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Christian Courier

A Reformed Biweekly

55th Year of Publication

December 13, 1999

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PASTEL DRAWING BY HARRY DER NEDERLANDEN

The clock snips time into measurable moments. The calendar divides it into years, centuries, millennia. At the central moment of time, however, we stand at the manger with Adam, Abraham, Rahab, Tamar, Ruth, David, Joseph and Mary, gazing in awe upon the miracle of God's arrival in the flesh – a miracle that turns all our ordering and reckoning upside down. We know our Savior only in fellowship with these distant strangers, who, like us, saw by faith. But how much more have we been shown!

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Christo regi, Deo nato,
per Mariam nobis dato,
merito resonet ver
laus, honor et gloria.

Let us now in every nation
sing his praise with exultation.
All the world shall find salvation
in the birth of Mary's Son.

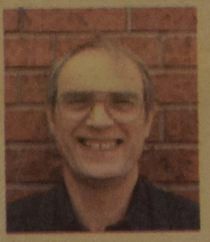
(Tune: QUEM PASTORES)

The CHRISTIAN COURIER Staff
thanks you for your
year-long support and
wishes you
a special joy in your salvation
as you contemplate
the birth of Mary's Son
in this season.

We extend our special best wishes to staff member Marsha Emke, Accounts Manager, who is home recovering from a broken back. We pray for a full recovery and look forward to her return to the office.

Marian Van Til
Managing Editor

Harry der Nederlanden
Associate Editor



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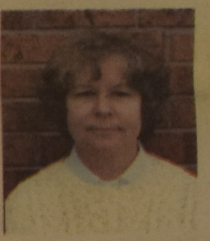

Grace Bowman
Subscriptions & Mailing

News

Amnesty International makes contact with persecuted believers

Alan Doerksen

ST. ALBERT, Alta. – At this time of year, many people are sending out Christmas cards to friends and family, but one branch of Amnesty International is going a step further by sending cards and letters to people imprisoned for their religious beliefs.

Each December, Amnesty's Religious Communities Co-group runs a "greeting card campaign," in which interested people are encouraged to send cards "of a non-religious nature" to prisoners of conscience, says Jean Elder, co-ordinator of the group. The reason for non-religious cards is that some of the prisoners are not Christians, she explains.

For Elder and her family, writing cards to prisoners is becoming a regular Christmas tradition. "Every year when the family gathers for Christmas dinner, we each write greeting cards," she says. "We have so much at Christmas time, and it's wonderful to think of others."

While members of the co-group stay in touch with prisoners by mail, other Amnesty members investigate some of the prisoners' cases. "Last year, a lot of people got replies back from prisoners. That was really encouraging," Elder observes.

One motivating factor for Elder and other members of the co-group is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 18): "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."

Promoting religious freedom

Elder asserts, "For each of us, the conviction and belief in this statement makes us act tirelessly on behalf of those who are persecuted, tortured, imprisoned or executed for their beliefs." Besides the letter campaign, Elder explains, "We have found ingenious ways to carry out our work of religious justice for all. In Terrace, B.C., Robert Hart circulates letters for "religious action" cases through the mission and outreach committee of Knox United Church. One of his great ideas is to develop a list-serve for other churches in his community, so that they, too, may join him in his religious action work."

"Religious Action" is the co-group's quarterly newsletter, which alerts group members about people being imprisoned or persecuted for their beliefs. The newsletter suggests courses of action such as writing to government or police authorities in other countries on behalf of prisoners.

JEAN ELDER PHOTO

Amnesty International's Jean Elder at work.

"Individually, I work on other Amnesty cases. I usually receive several replies a year," says Elder. "When we receive replies, we send them to the national office."

Not pushy

Elder is a Christian, but does not want to state her denomination because, she says, "I don't want to push my religion on someone else." She notes that "Religious Action" is sent to such diverse religious believers as Christian Reformed, Baptists, various Muslim groups, and members of other faith groups.. Often, Elder contacts leaders of religious groups on behalf of Amnesty. She has received positive responses from many of these leaders.

Some pastors work closely with their congregations on Amnesty issues, and "a lot of social action groups from various churches" are also involved with the co-group.

Another concern Elder has is capital punishment, which she opposes. She is helping to promote and circulate a petition entitled, "An appeal for a moratorium on the death penalty from the year 2000," which was authored by the Sant' Egidio Community in Rome, and which has been signed by Amnesty International Secretary General Pierre Sane. The petition argues against the death penalty because it is seen as:

- a denial of the right to life, which is universally recognized;
- the ultimate cruel, inhumane and degrading punishment;
- inadequate to stop violence;
- dehumanizes our world by putting vengeance and reprisal first, eliminates clemency, forgiveness and rehabilitation by the justice system.

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Editorial

Who is this Child?

Andrew Kuyvenhoven

This year many fundamentalist Christians protested the celebration of Halloween. Some churches got together on the evening of October 31 to decry the little pagans dressed up to "trick or treat." The same churches are pouring a lot of fervor into the observance of Christmas, although it, too, used to be a pagan party. Not only the *roots* of Christmas are pagan; its contemporary observance is thoroughly secular.

Nevertheless, you and I want to celebrate Christmas as the annual birthday party of Jesus Christ. We will feast in an appropriate, Christian style. And as far as we are concerned, the universal event may have value, especially if many more would be led to ask who Jesus is.

That's the big question, isn't it? *Who is Jesus Christ?* What do we do with him and for him? And what does he do with us?

Mysterious confession

The worldwide church has clear answers to these questions. Jesus is the Messiah of Israel and the Son of God. All human beings must acknowledge him as Lord and Savior of their lives and of this world. He remakes our lives into his own image. The final product of this transformation has not yet been revealed. That will happen at his Second Coming.

The highlight of this confession and the most mysterious part of it is the identity of Jesus as the Son of God. That's what makes the Gift so big, and the event so amazing. We believe that the Creator of the world gave his Son (who is and remains one with the Father) to be born of Mary in that night and at that place.

It took the church 400 years to agree on a "definition" of this awesome truth. Maybe the agreement was not completely unanimous, but, by and large, all Christians have acknowledged for the past 1500 years that Jesus Christ was and is truly God and truly human. All Orthodox, Catholic and nearly all Protestant Christians hold to that mystery of the Person of Christ as "formulated" by the Councils of Nicea (325) and Chalcedon (451). Many individual theologians and many sects and groups hold other theories about that central question of who Jesus is. Yet the agreement is most striking.

We don't love the language of the councils about "one substance" and "three Persons," and "one Person" with "two natures." But we accept them as a stammering effort to say something about the Mystery. We also remember that the interest of the churches was not merely in trying to analyze Jesus. The interest was in his significance for us. For the same reason the writers of the *Heidelberg Catechism* asked: "Why must he be truly God?", and answered: "Only God can save us."

Two-front assault

Today the church's faith in Jesus as the Son of God is threatened from two sides. The first one is the modern advancement of biblical studies, and the second one is the confrontation with non-Christian religions.

It may seem odd that the study of the Bible would lead to the denial of the deity of Christ. But the historical/critical analysis of the Gospels (especially) and of all the other biblical writings will slowly but surely begin to influence all parts of the church. It works like this: You ask the question (the central one!): *Who is Jesus?* And you conclude that the only answers you have are Gospel narratives, four of them, all written from a particular point of view, all with a definite purpose, and all four by people who believed in Jesus and his resurrection.

By scientific methods you attempt to get behind these accounts by studying the possible sources used by the Evangelists. Of course, we don't have their sources, but you would be surprised to see the reconstruction by the scholars!

Once we agree that all our information about Jesus is "packaged" in statements of faith, and that the whole "theology" of Paul is a later addition, we start the search for the unvarnished truth. Who was the Jesus about whom they told these stories?

Harry Kuitert, the retired professor of the Free University in Amsterdam, and well-known through his books, wrote a recent bestseller about the very question that concerns us here: *Who is Jesus?* He concludes that Jesus was a Jewish rabbi. Whatever else Jesus may have been (or believed he was), this one thing we know. Therefore, Jesus could never have considered himself "God on earth," "God in the flesh," deduces Kuiter. That would be totally irreconcilable with the heart of the Jewish religion. The "Jesus is God" theology which makes evangelicals ascribe to Jesus all the qualities of God, is no longer tenable, Kuitert says. Jesus could not have supported such a thought. It would have been blasphemy to his own Jewish ears.

Kuitert and those who agree with him want the church to strip the layers of "church-made Christology" from the image of Jesus. He does not want us to do so in order to make Jesus smaller but to make the God and Father of Jesus more glorious, he says.

The attack on the deity of Jesus from the side of biblical studies was popularized in North America through the so-called Jesus Seminar. Our newspapers and weekly magazines reported how scholars voted with color-coded ballots to determine (in a democratic fashion) if Jesus did or did not say, for example, what Mark recorded in a certain text. The learned company decided that while a little bit of that gospel record was genuine, much of it was the pious fraud of the author.

That so-called seminar did not do much harm to the Christian church, I think. The arrogant methods and the results were too far out for common sense.

The second attack on the deity of Christ comes from the side of the plurality of religions. Today Muslims and Hindus are our neighbors, and the radio station from your nearby university campus teaches the superior ethics of the Taoists. In the new millennium it will be increasingly difficult to evangelize those who don't know Jesus. It is simply politically incorrect. It is evidence of religious arrogance and intolerance.

Only for children

Who is this Child? We'll have to think harder and dig deeper before we give a traditional answer. Pray for the new generation. Pray also for biblical scholars who can be helpful to the Church of Christ in the 21st century.

For now just consider this: If this world has a Creator-God ,and if he is the Judge of us all, there is no more important question than how we are related to him. And if it is true that this Creator-God has sent his Son to be a Baby of Mary, because he wants to save the human race, then shame on us – and woe to us – if we neglect to bow at the manger and to kneel at the cross.

During the last few years all of the North American media have been trying to say something about the painful struggle of children to become adults through the torrent of their teen-aged years. There is one thing, however, that is harder than a child becoming an adult. It is for an adult to become a child. And yet, Christmas is for children only. I mean: unless we receive God's amazing descent to the stable with the wide-eyed wonder of a child, we will forever miss out on the party.

Andrew Kuyvenhoven is a retired pastor and former editor-in-chief of **The Banner,** *the official biweekly publication of the Christian Reformed Church. He lives in Grand Rapids, Michigan.*

Christian Courier

Formerly known as Calvinist Contact
Founded in 1945

An independent biweekly that seeks to: report on significant events in the Christian community and the world; express opinions infused by Scripture and rooted in a Reformed perspective; provide contact for the Christian community.

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4-261 Martindale Rd., St. Catharines, ON, L2W 1A1
Tel: (905) 682-8311; 1-800-969-4838
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History/Letters

'Good King' Wenceslas was a prince of a guy

Ted Tyson

PRAGUE, Czech Republic – Visitors here in beautiful Prague, now more open to tourism after the collapse of Communism, soon discover that the famous Good King Wenceslas of the popular Christmas carol was Prague's very own revered Prince, but never a king. And, contrary to the carol, he had nothing to do with the Feast of Saint Stephen – commemorated December 26 – which honors that first Christian martyr whose death by stoning prepared the assenting eyewitness Saul of Tarsus for his conversion to Christianity (Acts 7).

JOHN WALLNER ILLUSTRATION

"Good King Wenceslas looked out..."

Prince Wenceslas is now remembered by Czechs, and especially residents of Prague, as *Saint* Wenceslas. That city on the banks of the Moldau (which river is immortalized in the music of Bedrich Smetana) now has a population of 1.2 million, and is both the capital city of Bohemia and the capitol-complex of the Czech Republic.

More than a millennium ago, Vaclav G. Wenzel Wenceslas lived a short life. He was born in 907, and died at age 22 in the year 929 at the instigation of his wicked younger brother, Boleslav. Boleslav had Vaclav murdered while the latter was still the Duke of Bohemia, so that Boleslav would inherit this title.

Vaclav had been reared by his devout maternal grandmother. As Duke of Bohemia (921 to 929) he had promoted the Christian faith and made peace with the warrior German King Henry I (*Der Fowler*) formerly Duke of Saxony (Saxony bordered Bohemia). Following his assassination, stories of Vaclav's compassion, mercy, kindness and good deeds spread quickly through the Czech countryside, and posthumously he attracted a devoted following. He was officially canonized by the church and eventually became Patron Saint of Czechoslovakia.

Honored as kings are

Now, how did "Good King Wenceslas," whose own "feast day" is in September (the 28th), not December, become the subject of an English Christmas carol? Well, Ann, the daughter of the Czech King Charles IV, left Prague in 1383 to marry England's King Richard II. This occurred at a time during the Middle Ages when Saint Wenceslas was quite popular in Czechoslovakia.

Ann brought along to England books of Bohemian history, and she apparently spoke to others about various Czech legends, not surprisingly including that of Wenceslas. Whereupon one of her stories became the basis of that famous Christmas carol written by an anonymous Englishman.

In Prague today, if one goes up the impressive National Street, toward the National Museum, there is a Saint Wenceslas Park Square. Dominating this small square is an equestrian statue of Wenceslas wearing his shining armor and helmet, and holding his horses's reins in one hand and waving his nation's proud flag with the other.

Some 455-years after the death of Saint Wenceslas, Ann's father had Vaclav's body buried in a special chapel at Prague's Saint Vitus Cathedral, where the former kings and queens of Czechoslovakia and Bohemia are interred – which may have convinced Britain that Wenceslas was a King.

Paintings and tapestries illustrating Wenceslas's life and death adorn this small, jewel-bedecked chapel. (It contains 1,345 amethysts, agates and jaspers, worthy of any monarch.) Here too, there is a statue of Wenceslas, larger than life. He again wears armor – and this time a crown, monarch's symbol. Wenceslas's tomb is garnished with semi-precious gems, like those of the other monarchs buried in the cathedral.

In the late 14th and early 15th century the chapel became a focal point of the growing "cult" of Saint Wenceslas, who was by then seen to be a mystical protector of his country.

Ted Tyson is a freelance photo-journalist based in Toronto.

God's ways are not ours

Please allow me to respond to Rev. Tymen Hofman's letter in your November 15 issue. My first impression was to let it be, but as additional issues are introduced, a response is warranted.

Rev. Hofman states he has never met a person who became a Christian because of what Hal Lindsey or Tim LaHaye wrote. Beyond indicating that I seem to travel in much wider Christian circles, it does not prove anything. My wife and I love talking to Christians of all stripes, but we don't argue baptism with Baptists; speaking in tongues with Pentecostals; or transsubstantiation with Roman Catholics.

Maybe Israel and eschatology should be added to that list. We believe that God is more interested in people than in doctrine, and we prefer to talk about what we have in common and what marvelous things God is doing in our lives. Often we find that God uses authors of the Lindsey/LaHaye variety to draw people closer to him.

Everlasting covenant

Rev. Hofman mentions Israel, and the building of a new temple, and then goes on to say that Dome of the Rock would have to come down if a new temple were to be built. When we stood on the Temple Mount it was explained to us that the place where the old temple stood was far enough removed from the Dome that there will be no need for that. Even if it were, God can fix that problem in the twinkling of an eye with an earthquake.

Regarding Israel, Genesis records six "everlasting" covenants, and we all know that *everlasting* means *forever*. It does not say "until I replace Israel with the Church." Isaiah 62 and the verses of Hosea 3: 4 -5 are crystal clear; and the apostle Paul states in Romans 11:1 that God has not forsaken his people, and in vs 8 mentions "a spirit of slumber." To me slumber means they will wake up, and Zechariah 12:10 confirms that.

A final question: Why would Jesus return to the Mount of Olives? Would it not make more sense for him to come to Rome or Canterbury – or Grand Rapids? If God is through with Israel, Jerusalem makes about as much sense as Salt Lake City. However, rather than prolonging the argument about our differences, can we replace the names of Paul, Apollos and Cephas in 1 Corinthians 1:12 with (in no particular order) Lindsey, LaHaye and Kuyvenhoven for a moment? We are all one in Christ. Can we leave it at that?

Robert Anes
Brantford, Ontario

They're out to lunch, some say, but they're not at sea

In a back page story about Staphorst, the Netherlands in your November 15 issue, we're told that that "strict Calvinist" village is "100 km. northwest of Amsterdam. However, 100 kilometres northwest of Amsterdam would be somewhere in the North Sea.

Poor Staphorst. Try *northeast* of Amsterdam, and you may arrive in Overijssel [the province in which Staphorst lies]!

Bert den Boggende
Lethbridge, Alberta

Christian Courier

Member of Canadian Church Press and Evangelical Press Association.
Canada mail: Publications Mail Registration No. 09375. Postage paid at St. Catharines, Ont. Postmaster: send address changes to Christian Courier, 4-261 Martindale Rd., St. Catharines, Ont. L2W 1Al.
U.S. mail: Christian Courier (USPS 518-090). Second-class postage paid at Lewiston, NY. Postmaster: send address changes to Christian Courier, Box 110, Lewiston, NY, 14092.

Subcriptions:	**Canada**	**U.S.A.**
(effective Jan. 1, 1999)	(G.S.T. incl.)	(G.S.T. free)
one year (26 issues)	$39.54	$31.60 (US)
two years (52 issues)	$75.00	$60.00 (US)

overseas one year $80.00 surface mail
Advertising deadlines: display advertising: Wednesday, 8:30 a.m. (8 business days before publication date); classified advertising: Wednesday, 8:30 a.m. (8 business days before publication date). See classified pages for more details. Advertising rate sheets available. (ISSN 1192-3415) Published biweekly on Mondays.

Address all correspondence to: 4-261 Martindale Rd., St. Catharines, Ont. L2W 1Al, Tel: 905-682-8311 or 1-800-969-4838, or fax: 905-682-8313, e-mail: subscriptions: ccsubscrip@aol.com, advertising: ccadpromo@aol.com

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Family

The pine cone lesson

Intangible Things
Heidi VanDerSlikke

At the bottom of the big box of Christmas decorations are three little pine cones. I saved them from our first Christmas as a married couple for more than sentimental reasons.

Back in December of 1978 Jack and I had been married for only two months. Before I left for work one morning, I instructed my husband to purchase a spruce tree at the local co-op store so we could put it up for Christmas.

Specifications

I had specified spruce because that's what my family traditionally chose for a Christmas tree. When I came home that evening there was a Scotch pine standing in our dining room. It didn't matter to me that Jack had worked long and hard to make it stand perfectly straight and tall, which was no small challenge in a house that had been heaved to and fro by the frost of over a hundred winters.

I was miffed. No, I was annoyed. Okay, I was downright put out with his petty, selfish attitude. By the time he came in for supper that night I had managed to blow the whole thing so far out of proportion it's a wonder we're still married. I told him exactly what I thought of his stupid Scotch pine. Then he calmly explained that the co-op had only one spruce tree left, and it had a stem that ran at inconceivable angles. He kindly offered to drive to Listowel the next day in search of a spruce. I felt completely foolish in the face of his logical (and quiet) explanation. Score one for Jack.

I like to think I've grown up since then. But as you have likely guessed by now, the real issue that Christmas wasn't the tree. I had become completely caught up in the pressures of commercial celebrations that have nothing to do with the birth of Jesus Christ.

Wanted: perfection

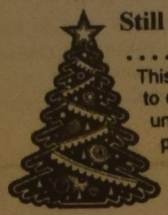
It was "our first Christmas" and I had tried desperately to make it perfect. But it all seemed to boil down to spending of one sort or another, and I was running at a deficit. It took major negotiations for us as newlyweds just to figure out with whose family we would spend what day. I had been scrambling around spending money we didn't have on gifts for people who didn't need them. I spent time and money on Christmas cards, postage and gift wrap.

Yet the harder I tried to think of everything, the more details seemed to pop up. By the time of the great tree trauma, I had all but lost sight of the real meaning of Christmas. Jack's calm reply in the face of my overreaction was exactly what it took to bring me back to reality. I promised myself never again to become so quickly angered by something so insignificant. When I took the tree down on New Year's Day 1979, I deliberately saved those three pine cones as a reminder to myself of the lesson learned.

By the time this column is published we should be in the midst of the annual frenzy. This year I will try to keep my head straight in the barrage of advertisements and expectations. I will take time to pray for those who, for various reasons, do not find this season joyous or peaceful. I will not allow myself to become stressed out about Christmas cards, Christmas shopping, Christmas baking or Christmas entertaining.

I will instead try to remember that we are celebrating the birth of our Savior, and for this reason alone I can experience peace on earth. And just in case I become blinded by all the glitz and glimmer, I will keep those three little pine cones some place where I can see them.

Heidi VanDerSlikke lives in Harriston, Ontario.



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Faith in our fathers

Kurt Kaesmodel

One night when my son Ernie's eldest daughter, Krista (my granddaughter), was three years old, she had a nightmare. Hearing sounds of distress coming from her bedroom, Ernie went in to comfort her and found her sobbing in her sleep.

"Wake up, Kris," he called softly, taking her in his arms. "You're having a bad dream." She clung to him and soon her sobs were reduced to hiccups and wet cheeks. "Oh, Daddy! Something awful happened! Some bad men came in our driveway and broke up our new van into little pieces!"

"No, no, Darling," he murmured. "You've just had a bad dream." And then in a moment of inspiration said, "Come, I'll take you to the window and show you that everything's all right."

With Krista in his arms, Ernie walked to the window overlooking the driveway and drew the curtains. A street light clearly illuminated the driveway and the brand new gleaming family van.

"See, Krista?" he offered reassuringly. "There's our van and everything is just as it should be."

Krista gazed at the scene in open-mouthed wonder and then seemed lost in thought for some moments.

"Daddy?" she finally asked.

"Yes, Krista?"

"Daddy, how did you get it all back together?"

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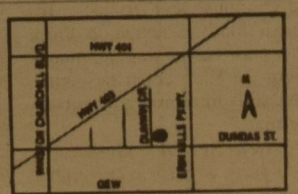

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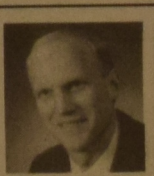

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Arts/Media

Faith in the valley of fear

Marian Van Til

The Valley of Cancer: A Journey of Comfort and Hope

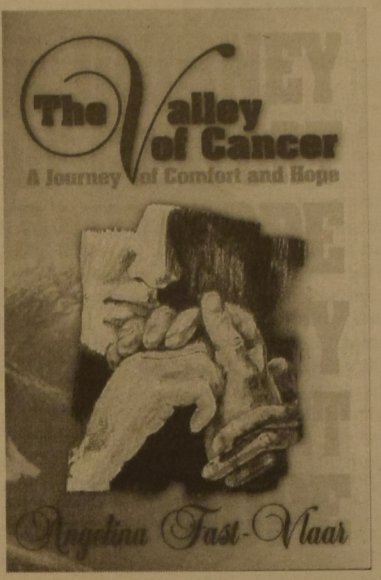
By Angelina Fast-Vlaar. Illustrations by George Langbroek.

Belleville, Ont. : Essence Publishing, 1999. 158 pp. Available at Christian bookstores, or order from the publisher (phone: 1-800-238-6376; e-mail: info@essence.on.ca; website: www.essence.on.ca) or the author (phone: 905-938-1175; e-mail: jvlaar@npiec.on.ca).

Earlier this year, before this book was released, *Christian Courier* published an issue whose theme involved facing cancer (and recovery – or death) from the point of view of both patients and their families. In that issue, Angie Fast-Vlaar of St. Catharines gave us a glimpse into her harrowing journey through the Valley of Cancer via journal entries and verse she wrote while she was ill. (In "stage three" cancer when she was diagnosed, she is now, truly miraculously, alive and well and in fine health.)

This book uses some of those same journal entries and poems, along with many more, to tell the whole story: from July 1997 when Angie's cancer was discovered, through her 18-month ordeal with chemotherapy, and ultimately to healing. Her writing is offset with effective pencil drawings by St. Catharines artist George Langbroek.

Obviously, when someone lets us in on his or her personal struggles with what most of us (and most doctors) assume will be a terminal illness, it's going to be an acutely personal story, one we might want to turn from as being *too* personal to be told. But struggling with cancer (or other possibly life-ending illness) is also universal. We are all finite human beings whose bodies will one day return to the earth from whence they came. That's why a story like this (especially when well-written, as this is) is not voyeuristic but, rather, legitimate, helpful and powerful.



Not so gentle 'wake-up call'

Angie candidly describes her cancer as her "wake-up call" – a not-so-gentle shove toward wholly relying on God, toward learning to experience the incomparability and intricacies of each moment of each day provided *for us* by our Creator.

In the background, but a very important part of this story, are Angie's husband, Joe, their children and step-children, the church community which prayed for them all, and the medical personnel whom Angie experienced as true ministering angels. Both Angie and Joe had lost their first spouses to cancer, and in finding each other have experienced a new and profound joy. So this new demon seemed especially cruel, and made them particularly vulnerable. Angie is not afraid to let us see those vulnerabilities and the struggles that result from them.

But she is also an example of shining faith, a faith which does not come across as unattainable for any of us who may consider ourselves to be "of little faith." Thus, for anyone facing such an ordeal, and for his or her family, this book truly is a "journey of comfort and hope," as its subtitle asserts. Page after page attests to it.

Refiner's Fire
Placed in a crucible
over a flame
my song-less soul
gives way
gives up
the impurities clinging within.
The Master skims the surfacing dross
and watches and waits
for His image to appear
glimmering on this mess
of sinful humanness.
It is enough.
He lowers the flame.
The song returns.
Refined.

Children's books

The King of Kindness

By Genie Stoker. Illustrated by Neil Taylor.

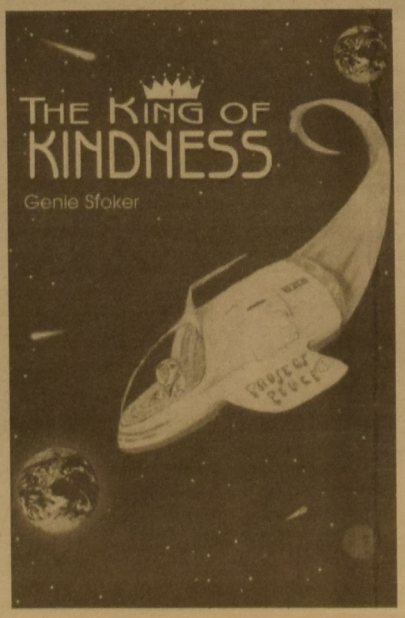
Nashville, Tenn.: Scythe Publications, Inc., 1999. ISBN: 1-55523-868-8. 28 pp. $6.95 (US). Available via amazon.com, or from the author in Tucson, Arizona (GEStoker@aol.com); 520-745-5038). Reviewed by Marian Van Til.

This book began life as a story told for children by the author at her church. The adults who heard the story urged Ms. Stoker to look for a publisher for it. It's a fine, imaginative story for children four to eight years old.

Every one on Borble's planet was fighting. So Bork the Boss sends Borble to earth to look for the alleged Kingdom of Kindness and its King, who might help them restore peace.

Borble sets off to hunt for such a king, and sets down in Norway, England, Canada and the U.S. Though he doesn't find any such kingdom, he makes an important discovery. Not surprisingly, it has to do with that King.

Finely penciled black-and-white illustrations by Neil Taylor enhance the story.



The Not-So-Wise Man: A Christmas Story.

By Alan MacDonald. Illustrated by Andrew Rowland.

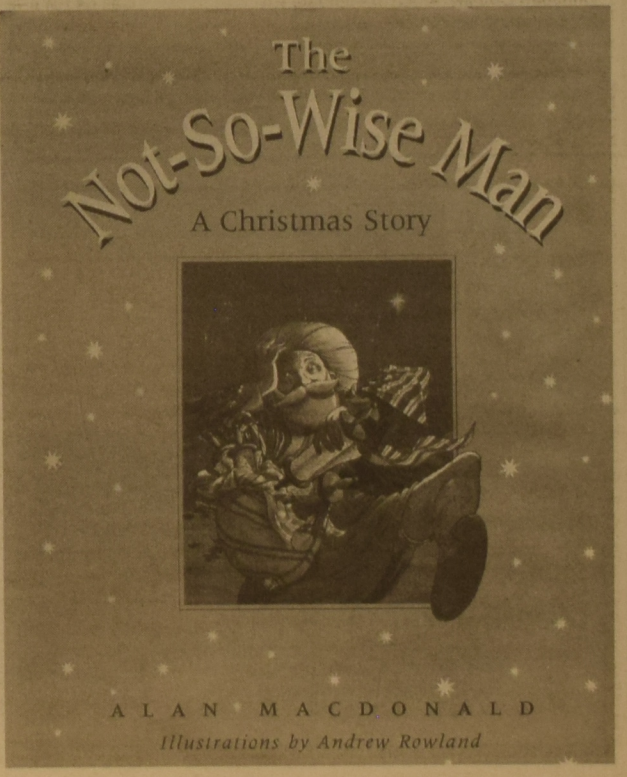
Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans (Books for Young Readers), 1999. ISBN 0-8028-5196-7. Hardcover. $15 (US). Reviewed by Marian Van Til.

If *The Kingdom of Kindness* (see review at left) presents Jesus to children, and sees children, and adults, around the world accepting him as the Prince of Peace, in this story the main character rejects the just-born child's being a great king "come from heaven itself."

That's an unusual approach for an elaboration on the Christmas story to take. But it happens, of course, every day; and, with adult guidance, this story will help children think about what effect Jesus can, and should, have in our lives.

Ashtar, a learned man who encounters the Wise Men on their way to Christ, takes his own journey to see the young child. But, not understanding that the wisdom of God is foolishness to us, he "wasn't foolish enough to think that a poor stable was the place" [where the King could be born]. So he sadly turns away, a "not-so-wise-man."

Andrew Roland's illustrations are colorful, whimsical and highly detailed, providing in their own right a "commentary" on the story. Recommended for ages 4 to 9.



Church

Christian human rights campaigner calls for the end to Third World slavery

COSTA MESA, Calif. (EP) — Baroness Caroline Cox, deputy speaker of the British House of Lords and president of Christian Solidarity Worldwide, is calling on Christians of the world to rise up and abolish slavery. "We would like to see much more solidarity among the Christians to get together to shatter the silence of this vile practice and to protest," she said recently.

"If international protest could bring down apartheid, why can't we use it to bring down this most evil of violations of human rights? I would like to see a protest movement developing to shatter the silence and to get rid of this evil phenomenon from the face of the earth before we go into this next millennium."

Cox observed that slavery is alive and flourishing in countries such as Sudan, where northern, predominantly Muslim armies are enslaving the Christian and animist believers in the south.

"There are different kinds of slavery, of course. The kind in Sudan is where women and children are abducted and used as travel slaves for forced labor, with sexual exploitation and forced Islamization of those who are Christians," noted Cox. "In other countries, it takes the form of forced labor, like the porters in Burma, where the ethnic minorities like the Karen and the Karenni are abducted to work in conditions that are so brutal that many die."

Cox reports that the slavery situation in Burma coincides with ethnic cleansing. "A military junta took power by military coup and threw out the democratically elected government. The ethnic minorities in eastern Burma are suffering from attempted ethnic cleansing by that regime. They are trapped in the jungle. If they are caught, they are usually slaughtered. Those that they don't kill are used for forced labor camps in conditions so harsh that they die. Others flee across the border and they are stuck in refugee camps.

Amidst suffering, Grace and grace

"I must say, in all this suffering, we meet people who are so gracious and so dignified. We come across the real miracles of grace," Cox noted. One of the most moving experiences she has had, Cox said, was in a Karen refugee camp in Thailand. These camps are frequently attacked and shelled by border jumping Burmese soldiers.

"I was walking through one of these refugee camps that had been devastated by the bombing. The homes were burned. Soldiers had run through, shooting at the refugees indiscriminately. There we came across this lovely Karen woman called Marsu. Her hut had been burned and she had been wounded – shot at by a soldier in cold blood.

"In the ruins of her hut, we asked what she felt about the soldier who had shot her so needlessly. Her reply was simple and spontaneous: 'I love him,' she said. 'It says in the Bible that we must love our enemies and so, of course, I love him. He is my brother.' We come across so many of those miracles of grace working with the persecuted church that we always come back so humbled and inspired and enriched."

Cox, now 62-years-old, admitted she is a grandmother of nine grandchildren, but she doesn't plan to retire any time soon. "It is such a privilege to be with our persecuted brothers and sisters, and others who are not Christians, who are suffering from oppression. It is our great blessing to be with them and when we come back, we try to pass that blessing on. To get other people to be more concerned with those who are suffering persecution.

"When we are with the persecuted church, it is sometimes scary. We may not want to go, but when we go, we remember Christ's own command, 'He who is not prepared to leave husband, wife, brothers or sisters, for my sake is not worthy to be my disciples, but he who does leave husband, wife, brothers and sisters, for my sake will find new brothers and sisters,' even under persecution."

British pagans lose charitable status

LONDON, Eng. (Religion Today) – Britain has stripped pagan groups of their status as charities. Paganism – including druids, witches and followers of a Viking god – is not a religion "in the charitable sense," the Charity Commission ruled. "Any charity must be established for public benefit. This is not apparent in the case of paganism," a spokesperson said.

Paganism is the fastest-growing religion in Britain, with 100,000 followers, London's *Sunday Times* said. Most followers are young, rural, working-class people. The main tenets of the religion are belief in the deity of nature, male and female gods, and the fulfilment of individual potential.

Groups that will lose their charitable status include the Pagan Hospice and Funeral Trust and Odinof, a foundation established to promote the teachings of the Norse god Odin. The groups will now have to pay taxes on direct donations.

Discovery supports Noah's flood

ANKARA, Turkey (EP) — Undersea explorers funded by the National Geographic Society have discovered new evidence that some scholars say supports the biblical account of Noah's flood. Researchers, including Robert Ballard, discoverer of the final resting place of *Titanic*, used sonar to discover coastline 550 feet beneath the surface of the Black Sea. Radiocarbon dating of the remains of freshwater mollusks from this coastline placed the age of the beach between 7500-6900 BC.

The discovery advances a 30-year-old theory that the Black Sea was created when melting glaciers raised sea levels and flooded large amounts of land in and around Turkey. Researchers who favor this theory believe that the event was so catastrophic that it became a popular subject for storytellers and minstrels in many cultures of the area.

Catholic colleges to be held to stricter faith standards

WASHINGTON, D.C. (EP) — Catholic colleges will be held to stricter doctrinal standards following a 223-31 vote by the U.S. Catholic bishops on November 17.

The bishops will require presidents, board members and teachers to follow church teachings. Theologians at Catholic colleges will need permission from a local bishop to teach. The bishops said theologians "have a duty to be faithful to the church's magisterium as the authoritative interpreter of sacred Scripture and sacred tradition."

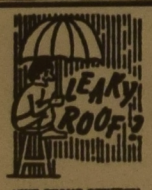
Some college administrators and faculty oppose the changes, saying they limit academic freedom.. But Pope John Paul II has encouraged church leaders to exercise control over Catholic colleges, as necessary, to defend Catholic doctrine. The Vatican must authorize the policies approved by the bishops before they go into effect.

Pentecostals honored by Malaysia

KUALA LAMPUR, Malaysia (Religion Today) – Christians have performed a wonderful service for Malaysia, the country's king says. Yang Di-Pertun Agong Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah presented Assemblies of God (AG)leader Prince Guneratnam with the Federal Award for the denomination's service to the country. It is the first time the award has been given to a Pentecostal leader.

The Assemblies of God in Malaysia ministers to those on the margins of society. The AG churches run drug rehabilitation centres, homes for orphaned children, and outreaches for the handicapped, abused, elderly and destitute. The AG has established an AIDS information and assistance centre to combat the spread of the disease.

The Assemblies of God has 40,000 members in 320 Malaysian congregations.



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Council of churches invites youth to experience 'hands-on' ecumenical work

Henry Hess

MISSISSAUGA, Ont. – Young people are the future of the Christian church and should be included in ecumenical activity, delegates representing a broad range of churches across Canada, declared recently.

The board of governors of the Canadian Council of Churches, meeting in Mississauga, Ontario, November 16-18, encouraged member churches to send youth observers or delegates to board meetings and to the commissions where "hands-on" ecumenical work is done.

The board has long wrestled with the question of how to include youth in the work of promoting Christian unity and co-operation. "This gives us a chance to mentor our young people – not only in the life of our own faith communities, but in the ecumenical task," said Richard Schneider, of the Orthodox Church in America.

Discovering, not seeking, common ground

The CCC is an ecumenical forum in which member churches may participate from within their own theological perspectives. "I don't think we would get very far – in fact, I don't think we'd be here – if we had to begin by looking for common theological ground," said Rev. Michael Winnowski, a Christian Reformed Church pastor from Waterloo, Ont. "But coming together in a forum allows us to speak and listen to each other, and sometimes we discover common ground."

Winnowski and Johannes de Viet, a member of First Christian Reformed Church in London, Ontario, represented the Christian Reformed Church at the meeting.

Three years ago, the Canadian Council of Churches adopted a new format, re-defining itself as a "forum of churches." That concept brought in some churches that had previously been reluctant to enter into broad ecumenical partnerships. The CRC joined at the vigorous encouragement of Rev. Arie Van Eek, who at the time was chair of the Council of Christian Reformed Churches in Canada. The CRC's involvement has continued under the Canadian Ministries Board, whose director is Ray Elgersma.

CCC General Secretary Janet Somerville commented on the forum's spirit of unity. "We're even seeing an amazing degree of co-operation between the CCC and the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada," she said. "We've never seen that before, and I think the Christian Reformed Church had something to do with that. [The CRC has] the respect of both organizations."

Winnowski described the atmosphere as encouraging and invigorating. "It's good that we can be here as Reformed Christians, but side by side with other Christians, all of us seeking to obey Christ, all of us seeking the unity he prayed for. I wouldn't say we've found that unity yet, but this way we have a chance of finding it. Or at least moving closer to it."

CCC PHOTO

Johannes de Viet, Peter Noteboom, Janet Somerville and Michael Winnowski were among those attending a meeting of governors of the Canadian Council of Churches in Mississauga, Ontario. De Viet and Winnowski are Christian Reformed Church delegates to the CCC. Noteboom was recently hired to work on the CCC's Commission for Justice and Peace. Somerville is the CCC's general secretary

Our families: *Love 'em or . . .*

Chapter & Verse

Mary S. Hulst Antonides

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." (Gal. 2:20)

If polls were taken during this holiday season, it is likely that on the top of the list of greatest blesssings and on top of the list of greatest burdens would be the same answer: family.

Some of us truly enjoy spending time with our families. Having everyone around, playing games, telling jokes, chatting in the kitchen as the food is prepared – these are a few of our favorite things.

For others, the mere thought of spending an extended time with members of our families is enough to give us hives. The reasons don't depend only on our families, but on ourselves.

More and more of us see our extended family only occasionally during the year. Our relatives may not have had an up-close look at how we have grown, changed, matured over the years. So when the family is together, some may expect us to be the same way we were when we left the house at 18.

This can be very trying. We see ourselves as an accomplished, respected attorney. Our family sees us as the goofy youngest kid. Trying to show how we have changed through the years can be difficult, so difficult in fact that we may fall back into the role we are expected to play.

Maybe you have always been the one who did what everyone else wanted you to do, who always thought what everyone else wanted you to think. Now, to express your own needs and opinions when you gather with your family may shift some paradigms to the point of breaking. But to deny your own needs and opinions is to deny the person you have become.

Higher on the blessing list

How can we, in this season of family gatherings, be true to the people we are becoming without hurting the people who watched us grow up? How can we nudge the family a little higher on the "blessing" list and move it down a notch or two on the "burden" list?

By remembering where your identity really comes from. You are a child of God; first of all.Your identity is determined through a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. You are secure in that relationship at all times, no matter what.

It is this primary relationship that needs to be the foundation for all of the others. If your security is in Christ, you do not need to seek security in a relationship with a father who has never expressed his love to you, for example. If you truly understand that you are a child of God, then you can seek what you need from him, and not from a mother whose standards were always too high.

Knowing our place in the big picture can help us deal with the little details as well. You are a child of God. So is your Uncle Dave, who drinks too much. So is your little brother Ted, who shows up late every year. Your mom is a child of God. So is your dad. Because these people are all God's children, not yours, it is also not your responsibility to fix all of their problems or meet all their needs.

You are not in control of their lives. God is. If you only see them once or twice a year, you don't have to try and "fix" them in those few short hours. Leave that to God. Before you see them pray for them, and pray for yourself; and when you are with them, just be with them, loving them with Jesus' love.

We can't fix others. We can't fix ourselves. Only God can do that. And he has already begun.

In the work of Jesus Christ on earth, God conquered the sin and brokenness which separated us from him and from one another. In Jesus Christ, we find forgiveness, wholeness, healing – a new identity. In Jesus Christ, we have what we need.

This holiday season, don't expect your family to meet all your needs. Don't expect to meet all of theirs. Instead, find your identity and find your needs met in the only One who can meet them: Jesus the Messiah, Word made flesh, the babe in the manger, your substitute on the cross, the maker of the empty tomb.

O come let us adore him!
O come let us adore him!
O come let us adore him,
Christ the Lord!

Mary Hulst Antonides is pastor of Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Bolivia 'crusade' presents gospel in word and in shoeboxes

SANTA CRUZ, Bolivia (EP) — When Franklin Graham issued an invitation to salvation through Jesus Christ during the Bolivia for Christ crusade, November 10 to13, some 19,000 people responded. Almost 140,000 attended the four-day event. On November 10, Graham and others delivered hundreds of shoeboxes filled with personal items to patients at Children's Hospital in Santa Cruz, and later to children in a residential neighborhood.

The shoebox gifts are part of Operation Christmas Child, the Christmas project of the international relief organization Samaritan's Purse, founded and headed by Graham. Some 18,000 boxes were delivered to children in the poorest neighborhoods of Santa Cruz.

Boliva was Graham's final stop in a five-country schedule for 1999. Next year, Franklin Graham Festivals will be held in Managua, Nicaragua; Dominican Republic; Lubbock and Amarillo, Texas; Lexington, Kentucky; and Boone, North Carolina. Franklin Graham has been named by his father, Billy Graham, as the latter's successor.

Here's a thought:
Why are a wise man and a wise guy opposites?

Confronting animals as commodities

Creation waits...

John Wood

I saw it lying in the grass as I walked along the roadside in August. The feathers were silky soft to my touch and the body still pliable. This northern hawk owl was only a few hours dead, probably struck by a car earlier that morning. These birds hunt during the dawn and dusk hours along the wetlands and open forests so common in Canada.

This medium- to small-sized owl is beautiful to look at, especially up close. The yellow eyes, with huge jet-black pupils were starting to collapse. But the plumage was still breathtakingly beautiful, from the barred breast to the chestnut mottled sides and back. Here was one of God's good gifts to us. I wanted somehow to try and hold the beauty a little longer. And to re-animate it, but that was no longer possible.

So what should I do with it now? Pick it up and carry it back to the lab to prepare as a study skin? Or leave it to be reclaimed by a host of scavengers who patrol this way? But the latter would only create a greater hazard, inviting small mammals to be struck, in turn, as they sought to feed.

And what of the countless other animals that are struck on highways every day? What do you do when your automobile strikes an animal? Stop? Keep going? Joke about road-kill recipes?

These creatures present us with a dilemma, one symptomatic of the larger problem we face today. We have lost our way in regards to the death of animals. We no longer have rituals, rules, or shared experience to help guide us. We no longer know how to give thanks for the good gift of creatures.

A new attitude

Death on roadways is only one form of animal death in our daily lives. For us to eat meat, wear leather (or fur), animals must die. Some also die in the testing of "consumer products," albeit perhaps not quite as many as before. Other species give their lives in scientific or medical research projects, while a select few are used in education. And then there are our pets. Reputable dealers work hard to reduce the numbers lost to disease and neglect. But the unpleasant task of every SPCA branch is putting down unwanted or neglected pets.

The steady dying of animals during the daily course of our lives is getting more attention today than ever before. There are signals from a number of places that tell us that something is wrong with our view of animals as commodities. Artists, poets and singers are among those protesting such a view.

The youth culture, weaned on "dolphin-safe" tuna campaigns, has begun expressing a vegetarian preference. Animal rights activists like People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), and Greenpeace's anti-sealing efforts have gained strong followings. All of this, it seems, says that we are in the midst of a great cultural re-thinking of our relationship to animals. This is in fact a sub-text of a much larger adjustment of our relationship to nature in general.

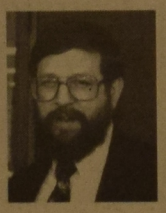
When death goes missing

Today we no longer share a common experience with animal death. Even when our pets are dying we shuffle them off to the vet. I recently polled my conservation biology class about hunting. Less than one-fifth of these biology majors had ever killed an animal for food by hunting or butchering. We had little common basis for beginning to talk about either the ritual or reality that surround animal death. Year after year fewer people, even many who live on farms, have first-hand experience with the lifeblood of animals.

Our society has lost touch with a central biblical theme. Death is no longer redemptive for us, it is merely death. Recall the Old Testament rituals: Sabbath, kosher meat (with no blood in it), not taking birds' eggs from the nest. These laws protected the people from excess and greed; they reflected a fundamental dependence on God. Animals were not mere commodities, but gifts from God.

It is no wonder the agricultural community is experiencing opposition from some sectors. We should expect opposition when we lose sight of animals and see only commodities.

Our *use* of animals has been secularized and commodified by the great integrating fact of our life: the economy. I think we will face increasing controversy unless we discover new meaning in animal death. We need to recover and reinterpret the place of animal death in our lives.



John R. Wood teaches environmental science at The King's University College, Edmonton, Alberta.

Rich countries owe $13 trillion 'carbon debt' to Third World: aid report

LONDON (REC) – A recent report by Christian Aid claims that the world's largest countries owe $13 trillion a year to the Third World and global community because of environmental pollution. The report, "Who owes Who?" (sic) published in the wake of the global campaigns for the debt relief for poor countries, claims that, because of a massive environmental debt, it is "illegitimate" for rich countries to demand repayment by poor countries.

The environmental debt of richer countries comes from carbon dioxide pollution, which is largely responsible for global warming and is consequently affecting the severity of weather-related disasters and flooding of low-lying land. The United States and Canada use 12 times the sustainable amount of carbon per person, says the report, whereas countries such as Bangladesh and Tanzania often use less than 1/10 the sustainable amount per person.

According to "Who owes Who?" the rich countries' carbon debt is now the clearest argument for conventional debt cancellation, but should also be linked to ... a commitment to tackling climate change built on the foundations of equity." The report also points out that "people in poverty are hurt first and worst when climate-related disasters strike," noting that 1998 was the worst year on record for natural disasters.

Christian Aid is not, however, calling on the G7 countries of United States, Canada, Japan, Germany, France, the United Kingdom and Italy to actually pay the "carbon debt" owed to Third World countries. Instead, these countries are being asked to forgive outstanding debt. This request reinforces the G7's increasing willingness to forgive the debts of the poorest countries over the past few months.

Christian Aid is the official relief and development agency of 40 British and Irish churches, and works in some 60 countries. Their report was produced in collaboration with the International Institute of Environment and Development and the Global Commons Institute.

This restaurant no Scrooge

'Mud pie' proceeds go to Prison Fellowship

Michael Ireland

MINNEAPOLIS, Minn. (ASSIST) – It causes everyone's mouth to water when the waitress brings it out: it's a pie made with coffee ice cream, homemade Oreo cookie crust, fudge, and toasted almonds. It's known as the "Mud Slide Pie" at Doolittle's Air Café, and this month, everyone who buys a slice will not only be adding to his or her waistline, but helping to make a child's Christmas wish come true.

Barbara Olson, owner with her husband and brother of the five Doolittle's Air Cafes in Minneapolis, is donating a dollar from the sale of each mud pie to the Angel Tree Project, a cross-U.S. initiative to provide Christmas gifts to the children of prison inmates. At 5,000 to 6,000 mud pies a quarter, "this ends up being a very nice contribution," Olson admitted.

This quarter (October, November and December) the business is donating the proceeds to the Angel Tree Project run by Chuck Colson's international Prison Fellowship. "The children of prisoners are a forgotten group. The parent who is in prison will ask for something specific for their child and then someone from the ministry will go out and buy those gifts and give them to the child in the parent's name. This is very personal. A 'love-note' written from the parent to the child, accompanies the gift. My mom is one of the volunteers who buys the presents," Olson explained.

The Angel Tree Project is expanding into a year-round ministry related to Prison Fellowship to support the children of prisoners' families – otherwise seven out of 10 will probably end up in prison themselves. The project sends such kids to camp and helps them buy school clothes, musical instruments, sports equipment, and things their families couldn't normally provide.

Doolittle's is also known for its alcohol-free New Year's Eve parties. On that night the restaurant stops selling alcohol at 10 p.m.. The proceeds of its parties are donated to Mothers Against Drunk Driving, said Olson. This year patrons will be asked to bring food items to stock local food banks in the area.

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'Seven Deadly Sins'

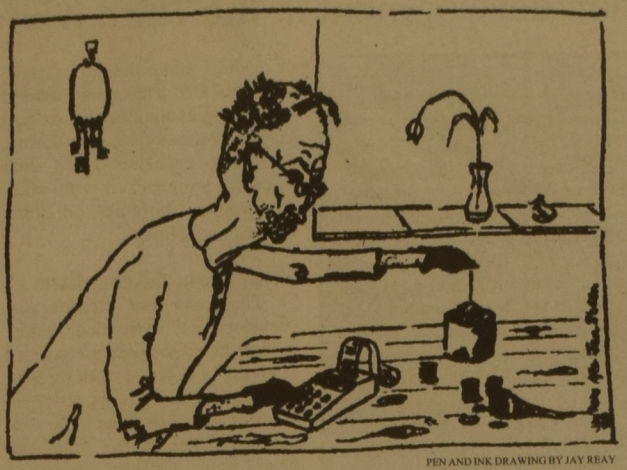
Avarice, Christian, is for the poor in spirit

Jay Reay

Avarice is the sourest of sins. To paraphrase John Calvin, it turns the sweetness of hard-won wealth into vinegar. Avarice is a desire for gain, for possessions, yet there is no pleasure in it.

The sin of avarice makes us greedy for possessions, working harder and harder to get more and more. But greed is just one part of this complex human characteristic. The sour note is struck when avarice becomes even more distorted, by what the Dutch called *gierigheid* – stinginess and meanness of spirit.

A special type of avaricious person we call a miser. Lonely, cold, grouchy – "miserable" indeed. Such a person's whole life is wasted in money grabbing, doing people down to secure an advantage, acquiring more and more yet gaining less and less.



PEN AND INK DRAWING BY JAY REAY

Avarice is its own reward

After a detail from "The Thin Kitchen" by Jan Steen, now in the Cheltenham Art Gallery.

The miser has been a figure of fun for centuries in fable, opera, novels and film. Molière, Rossini, the Brothers Grimm; Dickens, of course, even Chaucer, poked fun at the skinflint miser counting and recounting his precious hoard of dusty gold. Avarice leads people to become so frightened of losing the smallest mite of their wealth that they lock away their precious possessions out of harm. The key is their symbol.

To have and to hold

In literature and art it is often a wife or daughter who provides the miser with his comeuppance, and it is the duty of a Don Juan to free the miser from his onerous locks and bolts, and his more personal, inhibiting restraints. The key to the chastity belt is hung on the horns of a cuckold, often enough.

If the miser were merely greedy we could understand: getting and spending, acquiring and enjoying, grabbing and gorging, and perhaps spreading some of his (or her) largesse around like so many scraps off a groaning table.

But the miser wants to lock up his hoarded goods, out of sight, out of circulation. Mean with his money and mean in spirit, the miser lives an empty, uncomfortable, curmudgeonly life, sitting over a flickering fire in a bare room, unwilling to give of any part of himself.

Jesus' parable about the rich man and Lazarus takes avarice quite seriously. The rich man, who "dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day," is so bent on acquisition that he refuses the beggar Lazarus even the crumbs which fall from his sumptuous table. His reward is torment in hell, from where he wants Abraham to send Lazarus to take pity on him – to no avail (Luke 16:19 ff.).

There is also the rich man who builds bigger and better barns to store his accumulating grain and goods. He tells himself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." But God calls him a fool. That very night his life will be required of him. And then "who will get what you have prepared for yourself?" (Luke 12:31).

The Bible goes even further in identifying the sin of avarice as dangerous:

"For the love of money is a root for all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith, and pierced themselves with many griefs" (1 Timothy 6:10).

Self-inflicted wounds

We can be as unhappy poor as rich, but that love of money, that desire for gain in itself, sets avarice apart as probably doing more damage to the sinner than to others. It is truly self-centred and its wounds are self-inflicted. The wealth which gave misers so much enjoyment to get and to hold becomes a burden he or she must protect at all costs.

The miser can be unpleasant to live with and in the bad old days his power made the lives of servants, family and workers very uncomfortable. Scrooge, the Dickensian miser, depicts a form of avarice we rarely see in our society today. Forcing his staff to work all but Christmas Day, and for subsistence wages, he could be a modern sweatshop master – or their big brand name clients – but for the special meanness which sets the miser apart. A meanness of spirit which prevents even the richest from enjoying the fruits of their hard work and incessant scheming.

Satisfying the self

Christmas is a time when avarice is very much in evidence. As the sin of greedy acquisition, even as we celebrate Christ's birth we are all guilty of it. In the developed world in recent years, Christmas is starting earlier and earlier to give retailers the opportunity to get our bucks as soon as our summer holidays become a fading memory.

Shopping has become the new religion for many. The joy of giving is replaced by the joy of buying. The simple pleasure of an inexpensive but well-chosen gift is replaced by the desire for the latest, the biggest, this year's Barbie doll, the right brand name – all, of course, costing a bigger wad of cash than last year.

More and more we are treating ourselves at Christmas rather than buying for loved ones. We get caught up attending and giving parties. We buy more food and more drink for our own consumption.

Research shows that the trend is to spend as much on ourselves – for being nice to ourselves all year, I suppose – as on gifts for others. I recently had an invitation from a big name car dealer to "treat yourself to our latest model in time for Christmas." The Christmas Present is all but a thing of Christmas Past. The Christmas break is no longer the time to think on Christ's birth and to enjoy family and friends.

The tinkle of sleigh bells is replaced by tinkling cash-tills. Tom Lehrer, Harvard mathematics professor and satirist, captured it acerbically and well:

"Christmas, with its spirit of giving, offers us all a wonderful opportunity each year to reflect on what we all most sincerely and deeply believe in – I refer, of course, to money.... So I should like to offer the following Christmas carols:

"Hark, the Herald Tribune sings,/ Advertising wondrous things."

"God rest ye merry merchants,/ May ye make the Yuletide pay."

"Angels we have heard on high,/ Tell us to go out and buy!"

In the spirit of Lehrer's modern Christmas I offer the following diversion from the Yuletide hubbub. Sit back and contemplate whether you have the makings of a Scrooge within you.

You know you're becoming a Scrooge when:

1. Your key ring is too big for your purse.
2. Your cupboard has one can of Campbells tomato soup, a shriveled onion, a half-eaten hunk of cheese marked "A present from Vermont Xmas 1957 " and an unopened bag of sugar you bought three years ago.
3. The water in your cup is still clear after you have steeped your tea bag in it for 10 minute.
4. You take that Hershey's Kiss off your cookie when invited out for coffee, and hide it in a kleenex "for later."
5. You don't have change for a dollar to give to an appeal for starving orphans, so you give nothing.
6. You pick cigarette butts up off the street and save them, even though you don't smoke.
7. You don't smoke because you think it's bad for your wealth.
8. Your sugar, salt, pepper and ketchup supply comes from McDonald's.
9. You iron your wrapping paper and put it away for use next year.
10. Your metal detector is your constant companion, so as not to miss other people's dropped change.
11. Ten years after you bought it, your living room furniture remains encased in the manufacturer's plastic, to keep it "new."
12. You save money by switching to one-ply toilet paper.

A Merry Christmas to you. But not too merry – save a bit for next year.

Jay Reay is a member of the Church of England and a knowledge management consultant who lives near Oxford, England.

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Development in Central America

Of faith, fish and foreign aid:

CRWRC and Christian development in the Third World

MARIAN VAN TIL PHOTOS

Poor and rich juxtaposed, Haitian style: "Development is now seen to involve long-term strategies to assist people in permanently changing the conditions that are keeping them poor, malnourished, uneducated or otherwise in need."

Marian Van Til

Last summer *Christian Courier* and the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee heard about funding available from the Canadian International Development Agency for journalists to travel to Third World countries and report on development work being done there by Canadian agencies.

The government felt that such expenditures would be beneficial. Presumably after the journalists wrote their stories, the public would have a better understanding of development work. And a clearer conception of how a percentage of foreign aid money is spent.

CC and CRWRC were interested. So we put together a grant proposal, which CIDA accepted. CRWRC has had a 20 year relationship with CIDA, and is currently in the enviable position of being awarded annual block grants for its development work, which it uses at its discretion in about a dozen countries where it most needs the money – rather than having to apply for monies for each specific project for which it needs CIDA funds.

The CC/CRWRC project plan called for me to visit four countries – Haiti, El Salvador, Honduras and Ecuador. I would observe and evaluate CRWRC's work in those countries, focusing especially on its relationship with its indigenous partner-agencies in each country, whether that work appeared to be effective, and stewardly.

They and we agreed (and, indeed, the plan noted) that CC would not be merely a mouthpiece for CRWRC. I would be left free to report straightforwardly on whatever I saw, good or bad. As one CRWRC staff person put it, "We realize you're not an extension of our PR department."

That said, my impressions were overwhelmingly positive, and I believe that members of the Christian Reformed Church can be proud of the work this denominational agency is doing on their behalf in the name of the Lord in 29 countries worldwide.

A theme with variations

I visited the four countries from October 12 to 28. I saw much the same thing in each. What I mean is: CRWRC has a general mode of operation in each country; the principles used apply in each, and the results differ according to interesting cultural and regional differences.

What emerged, then, were variations on a theme. The current "theme" in CRWRC's development work has a history which involves the reworking of its methods, perhaps like a composer's rearranging and then further re-orchestrating a piece years after it was first written.

As its name suggests, CRWRC began life (in 1962) as a relief organization, not a development agency. That is, it existed to provide immediate *relief* to those suffering loss through natural disasters, civil war or economic instability. Though CRWRC still provides aid in such situations, including in response to disasters at home in North America, that is no longer its primary function.

Gradually the agency had begun to maintain a presence in some of the poverty-stricken areas where it was providing relief, and by the 1980s its primary function had become development.

Even after some 15 years, CRWRC still feels that its transition from relief to development, and the rationale behind it, are not well-understood by church members who support the agency; the change hasn't been entirely easy.

It is simpler, both practically and philosophically, to provide food relief in the midst of a famine, or clothing and building materials in the wake of a hurricane, than to assist indigenous peoples to find long-term solutions to their thorny, intractable problems when their countries are wracked with ongoing economic, political and, often, societal instability

Away from paternalism

Three and four decades ago, "development" resembled "relief" in that the former often consisted of giving to or doing work for people in need, no strings attached. But that approach came to be seen as detrimental in the long run. That's when CRWRC moved to "teaching how to fish" instead of providing the fish.

It did this by bringing in workers from North America who would "train" native leaders in particular skills, which would ideally allow those leaders to pass on their skills to others. This became the development model used by numerous North American and European agencies. CRWRC found that it worked beautifully in a few cultures but failed markedly in many others.

For example, when CRWRC would withdraw its support (sometimes after years), the work they were doing would collapse because there was no real "ownership" of it by the indigenous people. There was too much reliance on the white, educated (and "rich") workers from the First World who had the answers. There were cases, too, of the trained native leaders flaunting their authority and its trappings after CRWRC left the scene.

Partners in progress

Development is now seen to involve long-term strategies to assist people in permanently changing the conditions that keep them poor, malnourished, uneducated or otherwise in need -- and to do that as partners, not teacher and students.

In wishing to be faithful, effective and stewardly (with both church and government money) CRWRC moved to its current development approach, which is considered to be both cost-effective and healthy in relation to indigenous peoples involved.

At the beginning of the '90s, CRWRC undertook to educate its CRC constituency on the differences between "relief" and "development," and to give them some awareness as to how "development" is carried out. Just as approaches taken by foreign missionaries have, rightfully, changed over the years, development methods have also changed.

These days, when CRWRC sees a need in a particular country (or a new area of a country where it is already working), its first move is to look for indigenous groups with which it can partner.

If such groups wish it, CRWRC will provide support, but in a manner which will enable people to do more for themselves, not in a manner which sees CRWRC itself directing indigenous programs, selecting leaders or even participants, or "taking over" the work.

At the same time, in areas where Christian Reformed World Missions is also working, the goal is to gradually fuse the two ministries so that the Christian Reformed Church can bear a seamless word and deed witness to Christ in those lands.

This is already happening in Haiti, for example. But is a prickly issue in some other countries, given past frictions between the two agencies, and the dichotomy that has often existed between "Word" and "deed" ministry.

On the next pages in this CC issue, and as a feature in the next three issues, we hope to give readers a glimpse into how CRWRC's "partnering" approach works in Haiti, El Salvador, Honduras and Ecuador.

In the courtyard of CRWRC headquarters, Haiti, looking outward: "The transition from relief to development, and the rationale behind it, are still not well-understood ... and the change has at times been a difficult one."

CRWRC and development work in Haiti

Stories and photographs by Marian Van Til

A brief history of Haiti: A study in turmoil

The island of Hispaniola – now Haiti and the Dominican Republic – was discovered by Columbus in December 1492. There has long been no trace of the original Indian tribes on the island. The natives were early exterminated by Spanish and French colonists. Today's Haitians, who are black, are descended from the slaves brought by those colonists from Africa.

At various times, the island, or parts of it, was under the control of Spain, France or England.

Two-hundred-five years after Columbus saw it, the island was ceded to France by Spain, beginning 107 years of French domination. That's why Haiti's language is Creole, which is to French what Afrikaans is to Dutch. Lucrative coffee, cacao and sugar cane plantations were built on the backs of slaves, and the exporting of rum and cotton as well soon made Haiti one of France's richest colonies.

No panacea

By the end of the 18th century the slaves were in a position to rebel, and did. After 13 long years of war, independence was declared on January 1, 1804, making Haiti was the first independent black nation in the American hemisphere.

"Haiti" or "Ayiti" in Creole is the name which had been given to the land by the extinct Taino- Arawak peoples. It means "mountainous country" – an apt description, as any visitor flying over or traveling in the country will agree.

Independence was no panacea. The 19th century and 20th centuries have been no happier for Haiti than than the previous two centuries were. There was another 13-year period of civil war, beginning in 1821. In 1838 France recognized Haiti's independence – for a price: 150 million francs!. But almost everyone else did not until 40 years later.

Then during World War I, a period of U.S. occupation began, with the Marines finally withdrawing in 1934, leaving a Haitian army in their place. Three years later, the Dominican Republic massacred thousands of Haitians living near the Dominican border, under orders of their president, General Trujillo.

In the next 30 years there were several more failed attempts at moving toward democracy, setting the stage for the vicious rule of Dr. Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier and his infamous Tonton Makout. After 24 years of bloody repression, Duvalier died in office, leaving his 19-year-old son Jean-Claude to succeed him.. And like father, like son. It was 1985 before several bloody massacres finally galvanized protest against him.

In the last 10 years one "leader"after another – mostly army generals – has come and gone: Leslie Manigat took control in 1988 and was ousted four months later by General Namphy. Namphy was replaced within six months by General Prosper Avril. Avril was forced to resign due to internal protests and international pressure. Father Jean-Bertrand Aristide was actually elected by popular vote, only to be ousted by by Duvalierist holdover and Tonton Makout Dr. Roger Lafontant. Lafontant was removad by the army after massive protests, which allowed Aristide to be inaugurated (February 1991), with Ren Preval as prime minister. Aristide was ousted seven months later by General Raoul Cedras and other former confidants.

Controversial embargo

An embargo led by the Organization of American States (OAS) and eventually involving Argentine, Canadian, French , Dutch and American warships, attempted to break the usurpers' power. But Cedras ordered the UN Civilian Mission which had come the year before to leave – at which point the UN Security Council decided to send in a multinational security force of 6,000 to "use all necessary means" to cause the coup regime to "depart." (The embargo is still spoken of bitterly by many, and widely seen by educated Haitians to have harmed the impoverished peasants rather than the dictatorial leaders.)

After more diplomacy and threats, Cedras finally stepped down and Aristide returned from exile in the U.S. and resumed his presidency on October 15, 1994. Haitian law does not allow a president to stand for consecutive terms, so Aristide could not run for re-election in 1995. In June 1995, parliamentary elections were held, and in December former prime minister Rene Preval was elected president Preval was inaugurated in February 1996, and a government was formed under Prime Minister Rosny Smarth.

The current government has proved largely ineffectual. There is a widespread feeling, with some evidence to back it up, that Aristide, though out of office, has maintained political power through his friends who have remained in the government, and is in fact calling the shots. Many also wonder if this former priest has not become "just like all the rest" – addicted to power and putting his self-interest above that of fellow Haitians, especially the poor he formerly championed. Aristide is expected to win the presidency once more when the Haitian parliament finally gets around to calling both legislative and presidential elections, presumably sometime in the spring of 2000.

CRWRC staffer Mark Vanderwees talks with a literacy teacher and students in an evangelical church.

A cord of two strands is strengthened

Two years ago in October, staffers of the CRWRC and Christian Reformed World Missions in Haiti made a "covenant" to work together in that country as one ministry of the Christian Reformed Church in North America. Called "Sous Espwa" – Source (or fountain) of Hope – the two agencies want the two threads of CRC's mission and development work in Haiti to form one strong cord.

Together they will "affirm Christ's leadership in every aspect of God's fallen creation" by acknowledging each person's need for salvation, by working to reconcile people to God, each other and the creation, and reflects "God's special care" for the poor in a manner that does not foster dependency and allows Haitians' full participation.

CRWRC staffer Leanne Talen Geisterfer.

As the focus of my visit was CRWRC's specific relationship with its Haitian partners, I did not see specific evidence of how this is being worked out in programs being carried on.

My time was spent mainly with CRWRC staffers Mark Vanderwees, Leanne Talen Geisterfer, going from place to place, interview to interview, meeting individuals and groups, and the directors of other NGOs (non-government organizations).

I kidded Mark about being "The Mad Planner": he had my four-day visit exquisitely organized. It was a heavy schedule, but expertly geared to giving me a real feel for their work.

What Mark couldn't have planned was the closing of the Miami airport on the day I was to leave for El Salvador. Though initially disappointed, my extra day in Haiti was restful and pleasant: Nancy Vanderwees and I "discovered" a waterfall she had heard of but never seen. In the mountains above Port au Prince, and reachable only on foot, we were happily led to it by a young girl we happened

My visit had begun with a serendipitous moment while still at the airporti. Leanne Geisterfer came to pick me up. When we saw each other we confirmed for each other that we had grown up in the same town, had gone to the same church, to the same schools, and indeed, are related. For all that, we hadn't really known each other, and hadn't met since that time. But we found we have a great deal in common, and enjoyed becoming really acquainted after all these years.

Too close to North America

Haiti is an exotically beautiful country: lush tropical flora is still much in evidence, if no longer thoroughly covering its mountainous terrain; and the climate, though humid, is inviting. The Haitians I met, whether educated and well off or poor slum dwellers, were unfailingly polite and quick to smile. CRWRC staffers asserted that that is true of Haitians in general.

No matter how poor Haitians are, when appearing on the street they will be clean and nicely dressed. What a visitor may not know, however, is that a woman may share a set of going-out clothes with another woman because they simply can't each afford a decent set of clothes.

Haitians are no longer living

Continued on page 14...

Deacon power in Port au Prince

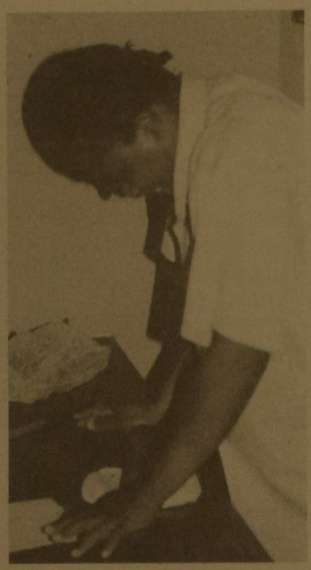
One of CRWRC's two indigenous Haitian partners is PWOFOD – an acronym pronounced as it looks: "pwo- (rhymes with 'go') fod," an urban diaconal training program which started in 1993 as a program of CRWRC.

Jean Odner St. Cyr, a pastor and PWOFOD co-ordination told me that PWOFOD's inception came at a critical moment, during the economic embargo. It started out training marginalized church members in the Cite de Soleil, the infamous port-side slum. (St. Cyr has a Canadian connection, incidentally: his son is studying at Redeemer College in Ancaster, Ontario).

The program grew with the needs it addressed, and PWOFOD became an organization in its own right, not just a program. It has been a struggle to get the Haitian men who are deacons (no women "officebearers" in Haitian evangelical churches, and there is no Christian Reformed Church in Haiti) to adopt the "servant" model of deacons in Acts 6, said St .Cyr.

Haitian churches of all denominations tend to be hierarchical, he explained. "They think a deacon is a 'big cheese' in the church, to make sure things are organized right, to substitute for the pastor. We wanted to promote the concept of deacons being there for social development, to provide help in society."

St. Cyr candidly admitted, "We have the diaconal training program in one hand; in the other hand we have the programs of micro-credit [offering loans to people who wish to start self-supporting businesses] and literacy as a carrot to entice."



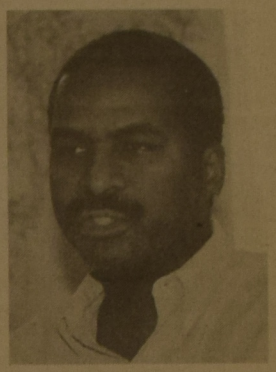
Saby Nadine, 28, has started a joint pastry "microbusiness" with a partner, helped by a CRWRC-supported loan. They live in what Mark Vanderwees calls a "middle class" slum, i.e., a very poor area, but not nearly the worst of Haiti's living conditions. Saby's husband is pastor of the evangelical church across the street, where literacy classes are held.

PWOFOD is now housed in a handsome "training centre," built with funds from the Japanese government. It has two floors of office space, just finished, which will be rented, bringing in the considerable sum of $1600 (US) a month. There is also a computer classroom, for training in computer use. (The 20 computers were donated by Calvin College, each brought over in the luggage of a Calvin student earlier this year.)

St. Cyr says CRWRC helped them "develop institutionally, to learn how to generate our own resources and develop them." CRWRC has encouraged PWOFOD to find additional sources of funding, which it has from two other NGO partners; it is looking for a third partner as a source for external funds. Internally, it generates income through literacy registrations, microcredit registrations, interest on microcredit loans, training fees, hall and office rental and computer courses.

This is an impressive organization, an example of good planning, dedication and enthusiasm. Mark Vanderwees says that a third of the deacons initially involved don't catch the vision; another third go back to their churches and initiate some changes on the basis of their training, but don't necessarily sustain those changes. But still another third "get really excited," and they and their churches are never the same; .333 isn't a bad batting average.

Jean Edner Jeanty
CRWRC justice co-ordinator for Latin America



Jean Edner Jeanty has worked for CRWRC only since January of this year. He was hired because the agency saw a need to better address "structural" justice issues.

Said Jeanty, "We've been concerned about development, helping the poor, medical issues, schools. But we need to change the way the church in Haiti (and in general) thinks about justice issues. We need to be concerned about human rights, commercial and economic issues. We want to involve the churches. It's not that the church has not been [at all] concerned with justice issues. The churches go into the prisons, for instance. But in their official statements they have not considered these things.

"By 'justice issues' I mean more structural issues: social distribution; why so many people are in poverty. An NGO (non-government organization) installed the longest water system in the northwest. But the way NGOs do development work is part of the problem. You don't need an NGO to provide water. You don't in Canada or the U.S. The way development has been done [in Haiti] is part of the problem. You may have two NGOs doing a water project in the same community. They're helping, but are part of the problem."

Jeanty continued: "It's a knowledge problem." If the NGO is still operating on an old model (North Americans running programs "for" Haitians, with little input from the Haitians), it's not helping to faciliatate long-term change."

A faithful church the best hope

This approach is more typical of church-related mission groups than NGOs, said one CRWRC staffer. "There's a lot of knee-jerk response on the part of individuals and church groups."

Jean Edner continued, "Port au Prince has enough wealth to provide basic services, but it's not being done. The values are not there. We don't have practice in solving community issues. 'We have this pile of garbage. How do we get rid of it? Do we know who to call? Is anything being done?

There's an attitude—based on past experience—on the part of the people that live comfortably: "What's the use? I'll build a nice wall around my property. I'm not going to succeed in changing anything.

"It's not so much, 'I don't care about anybody else.' It's that it's not worth the effort because they don't believe anything will change. They may have good ideals, but they have to provide for their [own] family first, and then they figure it's too much hassle [to do more.] The foreign press has an attitude toward the wealthy in Haiti that they are exploitative and just don't care. I don't see it that way. They are hard-working people. They try to get equipment, machines for people; they mostly care about their workers. I don't see them as 'filthy rich, oppressive people.' It's not that they don't care. They don't know how to get all the resources together and get people to start helping themselves."

Jeanty concluded: "A faithful church is the best hope for Haiti. CRWRC is part of helping the church see its role in that." And Jeanty himself is the one whose job it is to start the ball rolling.

Too close to North America

... continued from page 13

under severe repression, but the country remains in political limbo and one of the poorest in the world. It has virtually no infrastructure: roads are uniformly horrendous and don't get fixed; government ministries are catatonic; slashing and burning of rainforests continues because there are few environmental laws; petty crime (and murder) is widespread.

Hand-outs hurt

Because Haiti is so poor, hundreds of millions of dollars worth of aid and manpower have been, and still are being, poured in by well-meaning North Americans (and some Europeans), especially Christian churches and groups. In the face of that, one would expect to have seen a marked improvement in conditions and lifestyles in the country. But that hasn't happened.

"Haitians would actually better off if Haiti were not so close to North America," I was told. That seemed an odd thing to say, I thought. But gradually I began to understand. Hundreds of Christians a year come here on "work projects." And some of the same people even come every year.

On my flight home I met people from two different evangelical church groups who go year after year to provide labor for work projects. They build and paint and dig and offer healthcare in a country which has the least expensive labor force in the world. They do this without expectation of return. It's "free" and *they* "feel blessed" by it.

They're goodhearted, and they see this as a way to live out their faith. But ultimately they're doing the Haitians no favors. They are offering hand-outs. Hand-outs can be addictive, and Haiti *is* addicted.

A different way

Even some development agencies still operate in that mode. But the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee does not. And it has sought Haitian partners in development who share its vision. CRWRC staffers are compassionate and dedicated in a way that made me marvel (and they easily accept a frequent lack of electricity, hot water, phone service and other "necessities" whose lack most of us would grouse about). But the only thing they offer "free" is the gospel – and love, which they have in abundance for the Haitians among whom they work.

Does "nothing free" sound tightfisted? Consider: CRWRC and its partners offer loans, not gifts, to get, say, a woman started in her own baking or flower-making business. And they charge a fee for literacy classes.

A loan may be minute, but its impact is not: when income is generated from those baked goods, it makes the baker proud of her accomplishment – she who thought she'd never have a chance to edge her way out of poverty. The repayments are reasonably geared to how much income can be generated, and as income grows, new, slightly bigger loans allow for expansion.

The literacy class fee (minuscule, but a fee, nevertheless) helps pay for the books – and the teacher, who is from the students' community. That fee is an investment which usually keeps the student coming back to class -- and learning how to read.

Book Review/Tribute

Confronting warring death with the sword of faith

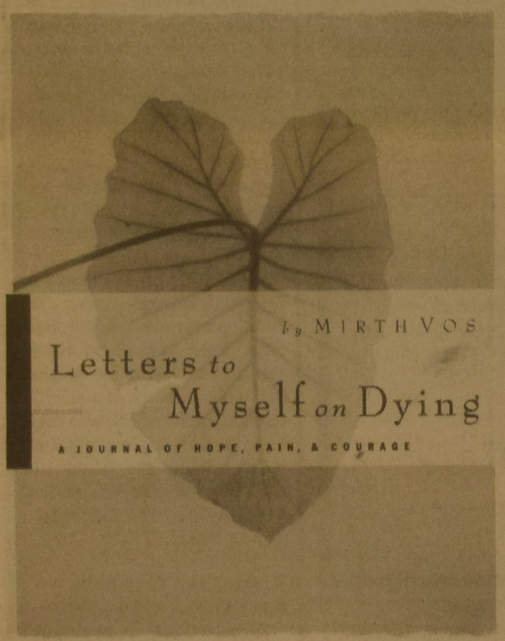
Diane Klein

Letters to Myself on Dying: A Journal of hope, Pain, & Courage.

By Mirth Vos.

Grand Rapids, Mich.: BakerBooks and CRC Publications, 1999. ISBN 0-8010-1189-2 (Baker). 1-56212-456-0 (CRC). 150 pp. $14.99 (US); $20.99 (Cdn) or $14.50 (Cdn) each for 11 or more copies from CRC Publications.

The death of Mirth Vos on November 14, 1999, sent waves of pain and sorrow through our community. At her funeral, I found my eyes repeatedly drawn to an unusual round window at the front of the sanctuary. I had never seen stained glass like that. Sunshine struggled weakly through the pale shapes onto the numerous flower arrangements. A picture of the living Mirth stood beside her polished coffin. Too much juxtaposition. Life and death together, beauty and sorrow.



But this had been Mirth's struggle exactly. Battling cancer, she had *lived* with *death*. And she had written about it in *Letters to Myself on Dying*. I had an unopened copy at home, deliberately unread because the matter of Mirth's dying was an issue between God and me. An outstanding issue.

Even after I bowed my head and closed my eyes during the funeral, I could still see the big round window. I had stared at it for a long time. The prayer was beautiful, full of comfort and compassion. Rev. Ringnalda prayed for family, for friends, for clients: *that we would be given the grace to let Mirth go.* Let Mirth go? This was *my* outstanding issue: I was a client who couldn't let Mirth go. Later that evening, I finally opened the book. Imagine my surprise.

One day, two and a half years earlier, Mirth had attended a funeral in that same church. She wrote about it in her journal:

My eyes raised themselves again and again to what I love best about this church: the very large round window high above the pulpit, fronted by an enormous wood and brass cross. The cross's arms extend beyond the window's round edge, and its main beam extends above and far below that edge. The window's many-faceted stained glass shapes of silver grey, pearl, beige, and gold geometrically ring the center of the cross, diffusing light that is at times soft, at times brilliant.

Worshipping at this church the last years I have often seen this window as a representation of the glorified Christ, visible to believers through the cross. Or I have thought of the window as the opening of Christ's tomb, speared with glittering angels. Today the window became the entrance to Paradise, its cross the door and its radiant depths an endlessly opening up terrain.

Suddenly I *was* able to let Mirth go. I could go with her only as far as the window. The "endlessly opening up terrain" pulled her into "its radiant depths." She loved this image of paradise from C.S. Lewis's *The Last Battle*, and I could see her moving "further up and further in" while I stayed here on earth.

Mirth's "letters" to herself – her journal, really, from April 1996 to April 1997 – form a beautiful little volume. It is printed on a satiny paper, making it a delight to finger and turn the pages. Subtle graphics form the background for the text – pale autumn leaves pressed for posterity between delicate sheets of parchment. What a fitting accompaniment for Mirth's delicately crafted prose – prose which is almost poetry: lyrical, emotionally understated, elegant, honest, fragile, heart-breaking.

Another striking feature of this book is the page layout. The text is composed of two types of copy. One of them is a selection of entries from Mirth's journal as she struggles with the reality of her impending death from lung cancer. The other is a collection of paper scraps, each containing a short Bible passage, which Mirth chose and wrote out as she scoured the Scriptures for comfort and courage. She would place these little pieces of paper around the house, so that as she went about her daily life, she would come across and be reminded again and again of God's ceaseless care for her. Now, they have been interspersed with her journal entries, forming a poignant dialogue between Mirth and God.

Severe steps toward Life

Even the most ardent faith must be severely tried by the knowledge of impending death. But here we have a striking first-person account of a heroic struggle to understand and accept. Step by step, Mirth climbs the inexorable stairway. Each step is a new way of thinking about death – and life. Each step takes more of her breath away. Each step brings her a new perspective on the levels which lie ahead. On each step the clothing takes on more of the look of celestial garb as the apparel of earthly life is discarded. Each step produces more life.

Those who knew and loved Mirth, as I did, will of course treasure this book, this gift of Mirth's left behind for the living. But even if you didn't know her personally, in this book you will still share her struggle one day, either over your own life or that of someone you love. We are all creatures of two worlds. Our stay here is temporary. I suggest we all follow Mirth's example: embrace this life with all our hearts, at the same time, get our hearts ready for a whole new life. Reading *Letters to Myself on Dying* helps the reader do that.

Diane Klein is* Christian Courier's *marketing and promotions director.

A tribute to Mirth Vos (1937-1999)

Thomas Venema

CC FILES

Mirth Vos with Dr. Al Wolters.

Mirth Vos has gone from this life to be with Christ. Even we Christians find her absence, the "empty chair," difficult to adjust to. Our loss is defined and profound because she has left an enduring and endearing imprint on her social world: family, friends, colleagues, clients, congregations in more than one community and her denomination as a whole, readers of CC.

Mirth was a significant member of the private counselling practice of which I'm a partner (formerly Lidkea, Stob, Vos & Venema) from 1983 through 1994. Eleven years of professional coexistence allows people to participate in personal and professional developmental stages together.

How did she grow to define herself with us as a colleague?

When Mirth joined "the firm" as a fresh and earnest psychotherapist in 1983, she grew to acknowledge fairly quickly that her previous work experience had not equipped her for the varied client population she encountered in the Niagara private practice field. She showed insight and perseverence in rapidly expanding her skills to deal with situations involving resistance, intimidation, abuse, abrasive communication trends and stress/anger management. Her ongoing quest for and joy with the acquisition of added therapeutic skills was an impressive and never-ending process.

A touch of class and mirth

Mirth built a trusted professional image as a female therapist with the solid attributes of integrity, intelligence and warmth. She brought a sense of dignity and grace to our firm which we three males had an incapacity to construct without her. She often served to smooth over rough edges with her dedication to detail and positive office atmosphere.

Mirth's commitment to client growth and healing were obvious. Her capacity to articulate – to verbally encapsulate social/individual needs – was impressive in both a written and oral format. She gifted our organization with a "touch of class" and a pronounced degree of social credibility. She would often chuckle at the life-irony of her inclusion in our company format as the "sole-late-bloomer-female-therapist" in our unique blend of social-work-background male-therapists. We were empowered by her vulnerable yet courageous struggle with cancer. And her spiritual witness was a quiet but assuring part of her journey.

Her place in our agency's life history is cherished and will never be extinguished. Her recently published book *Letters to Myself on Dying* [see review opposite] is a remarkable window into the person that was *Mirth* to us all.

Tom Venema is a therapist-partner in Lidkea, Stob, Venema & Associates in St. Catharines, Ontario.

May this Christmas Season bring you joy for the present and hope for the New Year!

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HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

The Halton Region Christian Education Association is seeking a qualified individual to fill the position of principal at its new Christian high school to open in September, 2000. The school will be located in the Halton Region.

Applicants should have an Ontario Teaching Certificate or Letter of Standing. Graduate studies, Principal and/or Supervisory Officer qualifications, as well as administrative experience in a Christian School are desirable. The successful candidate will be expected to provide spiritual, academic and administrative leadership to a growing and developing school community.

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Milton, ON L9T 2X8
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Applications will be received until November 30, 1999.

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CC Ad deadlines for the next two issues:
Dec. 27 issue: Dec. 10
Jan. 4 issue: Dec. 20

News Digest

Have a blessed lawsuit

INDIANAPOLIS, Ind. (Religion Today) – A woman who was ordered to stop saying "Have a blessed day" at work has sued her company. Liz Anderson of USF Logistics in Indianapolis filed charges with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunities Commission Nov. 9. She has been with the company more than three years and was named office employee of the year in 1998.

But in June her employers ordered her to stop telling co-workers to "Have a blessed day" or be fired. She agreed to stop, but now believes the order infringes on her religious freedom. "This was a religious practice of hers based on her Christianity," Kevin Betz, her attorney, said.

Falling demand for stuntmen

TORONTO — "Phil Culotta misses getting beaten up," says the Associated Press. "The veteran stuntman was hired to double for Kevin Bacon in an upcoming sci-fi movie, but, like a growing number of America's stunt performers, Culotta said he lost most of the derring-do to a computer-generated replacement."

The trade agency Stunts Unlimited estimates only 200 stunt performers work full-time, down from about 400 in the 1970s. During the making of Titanic, footage of a handful of stunt performers was captured and multiplied by computer to simulate dozens of ill-fated passengers sliding from the deck of the broken ship as it sunk.

Rhino-like fossils in Arctic

EDMONTON (CP) – Canadian scientists say they have discovered the fossilized remains of a huge rhinoceros-like creature in Canada's high Arctic. Paleontologists Jaelyn Eberle and John Storer found the fossils on the northeast corner of Axel Heiberg Island, where one of the largest, oldest and most exquisitely-preserved fossil forests in the world was discovered in 1985.

The scientists say the find gives credence to theories that the polar region enjoyed semi-tropical conditions millions of years ago. The pair also found fossil remains of alligators on the island's east coast.

Scheduled Occasions for Angel Song

THE NEWBORN CHILD (DETAIL), BY GEORGE DE LA TOUR (CA. 1646-8)

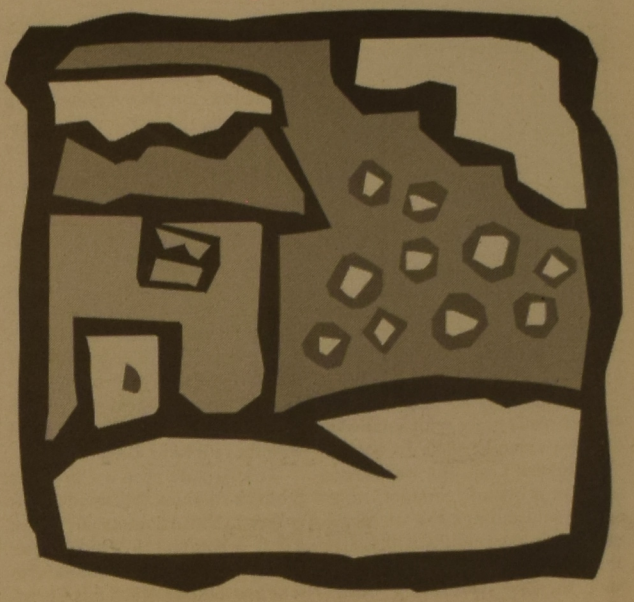
It was a birth with blood
and pain, as all births are,
attended only by a Jewish husband,
nervous, inexperienced in wonders,
a kindly man whose love poured forth
that starlit night in tears of pain
for her pain,
whose gentle, calloused,
trembling hands received – for her,
for you, for me, oh, joy! – the tiny,
red-faced, helpless God.

Two thousand years have passed,
and in this world of blood and pain
redeemed – oh, joy! – by blood
and pain we pilgrims kneel and
scan the cold December clouds. Our
love, our pain pour forth in tears,
our weary hands stretch high, eager
to receive once more the long awaited
fireburst of the sky, the song, and,
yet again, the glorious, triumphant
body of our God.

Ann Applegarth
Eugene, Oregon

Snow Angels

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema



I trudged through the winter air carrying a bucket of vegetable slops to the compost pile in our desolate garden. Looking down, I noticed two silent angels beside the icy, well-trod garden path. Someone with flapping arms had been there before me.

When I returned to the warm kitchen, my six-year-old son was sitting at the table where I had left him, diligently building a cardboard helicopter.

"Benjamin, did you make those snow angels in the backyard?" I asked.

He looked up from his cutting and gluing, and smiled. "Yup! One is Gabriel. The other one is Satan."

"Satan?" I exclaimed.

"Yeah. You know, the angel that fell." He paused as if to prepare me for another startling revelation. "And I made God, too!"

"You did?" I asked, surprised.

"Yup! But I lay straight when I made him"

Benjamin demonstrated by standing up on his chair, arms rigidly pinned to his sides. Then he continued, "Because God doesn't have wings. He wears one of those robes, you know."

That was several years ago. But I still thank God for Benjamin and his snow angels. They remind me of a spiritual reality that is difficult to focus on in the rush and restless hype of the Christmas season. Yet if I ignore it, I will fail to understand the conflict central to the meaning of Christmas.

The birth of Jesus was the "Battle of Normandy" in the Conflict of All Conflicts, the war between God and Satan for the hearts of men, women, and children, that began in the Garden of Eden. It was a strategic step in God's plan to deliver humanity from the power of the enemy, as he had promised. It signaled his ultimate victory.

The Bible does not tell us how Satan responded to this divine initiative, but we can see his fingerprints on King Herod's attempt to destroy the Christ Child. When the Magi came to Jerusalem looking for "the one who had been born King of the Jews," Herod lied. And when the Magi foiled his evil scheme, he murdered all the boys under the age of two in the Bethlehem area.

We can hardly imagine the parents' terror and grief as they witnessed this slaughter. But *that's* the reality of Christmas. That's what happens when Satan tries to annihilate the work of God. The innocent suffer. The battle becomes vicious and gory.

And that's the reality of spiritual warfare that continues to this day. We shouldn't be surprised by it, or lulled into ignoring its existence. Paul tells us to take our stand against the devil's schemes: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Ephesian 6:12).

Benjamin's snow angels made me focus again on the spiritual battle, seemingly incongruous with the words and ambience of a hymn like "Silent Night." And the picture of God who "is wearing one of those robes," as Benjamin put it, refocused my vision on Isaiah's words: "I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple" (Isaiah 6:1).

This Christmas, aware of the spiritual battle that continues to rage, I'll praise our victorious, majestic God for sending his Son to save his people. And I'll thank him for snow angels and the wisdom of children.

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema is a freelance writer who lives in St. Catharines, Ontario.

Satan at the manger

Abraham Kuyper

The Babe of Bethlehem involves two parties – God in heaven above and the sinner on earth below. But there are not just these two; there is also a third: for Satan is also there, the old Deceiver from Paradise, who brought division between the first two.

Bethlehem, therefore, puts before us two options, one the direct opposite of the other: either we have peace with God and therefore enmity with Satan; or we have peace with Satan and enmity with God.

In the Fall in Paradise the woman made peace with Satan and thus we came to stand in enmity over against God. But on Christmas eve a cry of jubilation rings out: in and through the Child we once again have enmity with Satan and peace with God. You can't have the one without the other. They are inseparable.

This is why to speak only of peace and nothing but peace at Bethlehem is superficial. Those who wish to learn from Scripture and who wish to celebrate Christmas according to Scripture will not stop at the declaration of peace by the angels, for they know that it also means the declaration of enmity with Satan pronounced by God himself in Paradise.

Seduced by sweet peace

For those seduced by the sweet melody of peace without the darker tones, the joy of Christmas is but an oasis in life's desert. The Christmas celebrations are, then, a brief escape from the struggles of life. To dreamily enter into this unnatural, unreal state is to play a kind of angelic game unconnected with the realities of life.

To celebrate such a Christmas profits us nothing. In fact, it harms us. It is to abuse the manger, to turn it into a spiritual diversion. After taking our enjoyment, we have to return to a life in which this Christmas doesn't fit. It doesn't belong to it; it was injected into it like a heavenly mirage.

Christmas may not become a mirage. That would be to celebrate the incarnation as if God did not become flesh. And what Christmas is all about is precisely the entry of our Mediator into the reality of our being, of our lives, of our fallen existence, of our trials and our struggle with death.

His birth in Bethlehem is not an isolated event. It is the first step along a path on which the second will be toward Satan in the wilderness, the third toward Gethsemane, the fourth into hell, the fifth to death on the cross, and the sixth into the grave.

Our exaltation, his humiliation

The manger means the beginning of our exaltation but it is the beginning of his humiliation. The manger and the swaddling cloths spell it out: no room for him.

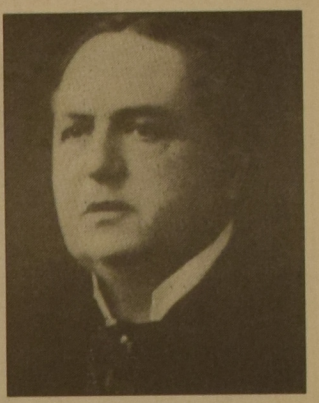
Is it right that we allow ourselves to be exhilarated by the beauty of this first step of his humiliation? Is it right that just because we have been made rich, that we forget that this is the beginning of his poverty?

If this gives you pause, perhaps then you will understand the earnestness of our forebears who were afraid of celebrating Christmas for precisely this reason – that we would be seduced by the announcement of peace to forget our enmity with Satan.

It was by taking on the flesh and blood of the children that our Mediator, more powerfully than in any other way, proclaimed peace unto us, but also aroused the enmity of Satan and of the world. That enmity begins at the manger, and at the very moment that the angelic hosts are singing "Peace on earth," they are grimly plotting against him in Jerusalem.

Satan cannot tolerate this manger. It means the end of his rule. He knows that this Child has been born to destroy his work, the work of the Devil. He knows that this Child will crush his head.

If we understand Christmas in this way, it is no longer a drop of oil on troubled water. Then it merges into the life of God's church. Christ has been born and thereby precipitated Satan's enmity against his church.



Abraham Kuyper

To love Jesus is not a matter of feeling good or a product of our fantasy. To love the Babe of Bethlehem means to hate sin, to hate Satan, to hate the injustice that Satan supports.

***Excerpted from** Vier Uwe Vierdagen.*

The Bethlehem of Jesus

Charles Spurgeon

It seemed meet and right that our Savior should be born in Bethlehem, and that because of Bethlehem's history. Because of this history, it seemed necessary that Christ should be born in Bethlehem.

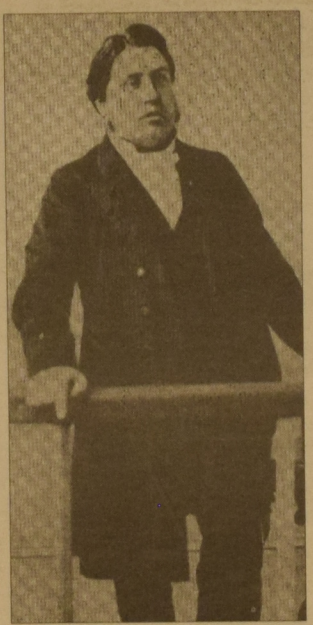
Dear to every Israelite was the little village of Bethlehem. Jerusalem might outshine it in splendor; for there stood the temple, the glory of the whole earth, and "beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth was Mount Zion"; yet around Bethlehem there clustered a number of incidents which always made it a pleasant resting place to every Jewish mind; and even the Christian cannot help loving Bethlehem.

The first mention, I think, that we have of Bethlehem, is a sorrowful one. There Rachel died. If you turn to Genesis 35:16: *And they journeyed from Bethel; and there was but a little way to come to Ephrath; and Rachel travailed, and she had hard labor. And it came to pass, when she was in hard labor, that the midwife said unto her, Fear not; thou shalt have this son also. And it came to pass, as her soul was in departing, (for she died) that she called his name Ben-oni: but his father called him Benjamin. And Rachel died, and was buried on the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem. And Jacob set a pillar upon her grave, that is the pillar of Rachel's grave unto this day.*

A singular incident

A singular incident this – almost prophetic. Might not Mary have called her own son Jesus, her Ben-oni; for he was to be the child of Sorrow? Simeon said to her: *"Yea, a sword shall pierce through thine own soul also, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."*

But while she might have called him Ben-oni, what did God his Father call him? Benjamin, the son of my right hand. Ben-oni was he as a man; Benjamin as to his Godhead.



CC FILE PHOTOS

Charles Spurgeon

This little incident seems to be almost a prophecy that Ben-oni – Benjamin, the Lord Jesus, should be born in Bethlehem.

But another woman makes this place celebrated. That woman's name was Naomi. There lived at Bethlehem in after days, when, perhaps, the stone that Jacob's fondness had raised had been covered with moss and its inscription obliterated, another woman named Naomi. She too was a daughter of joy, and yet a daughter of bitterness. Naomi was a woman whom the Lord had loved and blessed, but she had to go to a strange land; and she said, "Call me not Naomi (pleasant) but let my name be called Mara (bitter) for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me." Yet was she not alone amid all her losses, for there cleaved unto her Ruth the Moabitess, whose Gentile blood should unite with the pure untainted stream of the Jew, and should thus bring forth the Lord our Savior, the great king both of Jews and Gentiles.

A beautiful book

That very beautiful book of Ruth had all its scenery laid in Bethlehem. It was at Bethlehem that Ruth went forth to glean in the fields of Boaz; it was there that Boaz looked upon her, and she bowed herself before her lord; it was there her marriage was celebrated; and in the streets of Bethlehem did Boaz and Ruth receive a blessing which made them fruitful so that Boaz became the father of Obed, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David.

That last fact gilds Bethlehem with glory – the fact that David was born there – the mighty hero who smote the Philistine giant, who led the discontented of his land away from the tyranny of their monarch, and who afterwards, by a full consent of a willing people, was crowned king of Israel and Judah.

A royal city

Bethlehem was a royal city, because the kings were there brought forth. Little as Bethlehem was, it was much to be esteemed; because it was like certain principalities which we have in Europe, which are celebrated for nothing but for bringing forth the consorts of the royal families of England.

It was right, then, from history, that Bethlehem should be the birth-place of Christ.

An excerpt of about one- tenth of Spurgeon's sermon**, "The Incarnation and Birth of Christ," **delivered Dec. 23, 1855. To read the complete sermon online see:** **www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0057.html

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Star of the Nativity:
Boris Pasternak's conception of the Incarnation in *Doctor Zhivago*

Frank Sawyer

"...The revolution had been a god come down to earth from heaven." (Pasternak, *Doctor Zhivago*)

It was wintertime.
The wind blew from the plain,
And the infant was cold
In the cave on the slope of a knoll.

The breath of an ox served to warm Him.
The cattle were huddling
Within the cave.
Warmth hovered in a mist over the manger.
"Let us go with all others and worship the miracle"...
(Pasternak, "Star of the Nativity")

Christmas has come to mean a time of family gatherings, special food on the table, and a Christmas tree and presents. Capitalist society has taken Christ out of Christmas and turned this season of the year into the most intense shopping orgy imaginable. While this has become part of the December tradition in the West, it took more subdued forms under Communism. Thus, it's surprising to see how important the Christmas theme is in Boris Pastenak's famous novel *Doctor Zhivago*.

The Savior Icon: *"In Dr. Zhivago, we find surprisingly many references to Christ and to spirituality as a higher mode of life than mere materiality.*

The novel is one of the most important pieces of literature written in our century. On a superficial level it is a story about Zhivago's love for two women whom he is "destined" to meet and be tom away from because of the upheavals of society at the time of the Russian Revolution. But the novel goes deeper than the story of one or two lives: it deals with the sweeping themes of war and peace, political ideologies, love and separation, birth and death. Pasternak talks about the coming of Christ.

The Word became flesh

A chapter called "The Sventitskys' Christmas Party" reminds us that people still need a time when they enjoy the cosiness of family life and human friendships, and can celebrate significant events. Even after giving to Caesar what is Caesar's, the heart thirsts for more than politico-ideological celebrations. We Christians are called to be in the world and for the world, but not of the world. In a quite unexpected way, Pasternak reminds us of this. He was stating a good word for the Gospel of Jesus Christ in his struggle to sort out choices between Communist dictatorship and modern individualistic liberalism.

We find surprisingly many references to Christ and to spirituality as a higher mode of life than mere materiality. The novel celebrates carnality but also seeks deeper spiritual roots. The name of the central person in this novel means *life*.

The novel opens with death, the death of Zhivago's mother when he was nine years old. The novel ends with Zhivago's own funeral. For a great part of it, the purpose of the novel seems to be to ask about the meaning of life, history and death, and it throws a barbed challenge at Marxist materialism.

The plot tells us a story of some lives which are interwoven by the fateful events of the Revolution in Russia. The main events include the brokenly beautiful and tragic aspects of the love between Yurii and Lara. But there is also Strelnikov, who sacrifices all family and personal goals in order to serve the Revolution. He gives up creative thinking and impersonates an idea. He is an ideological machine.

This is in contrast to Zhivago who lives for art and beauty. Various statements in the novel reveal the weakness of all carnality, that is, all faith in any aspect of human existence. Both the Revolution and love between a man and woman are described as something divine come down from heaven.

But such carnality, such a surrogate heaven on earth, is also shown to be a false hope if absolutized. So the depth of thought and emotion in the novel push the writer and reader to answer the deepest questions about the meaning of life. Pasternak intertwines life's meaning with the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Continued on page 20...

The Lineage of Christ: Adam, Abraham, Tamar, Ruth, David, Joseph, Mary at the manger

Adam

After presuming to understand
so much, how little we understood
then of what transpired, was said,
cowering under the hanging trees.
The voice that spoke the serpent's curse
while speaking seemed to steal
the very seeds of life from deep
within to scatter it beyond the fields,
the hedgerows, the hills, beyond thought,
the northwind of his words wafting all,
all away like leaves, like dandelion wool.

As bold and robust as we were
before, bursting with possibility,
as though the seed of all creation
were germinating in our loins,
so timid, guarded we became.
There were fierce angels made of steel,
roaring beasts, winds that tore leaves
from trees, huge rocks, thorns, thistles,
blood seeping into the hard, dry ground.
We fled. Became like frightened hares,
moving from copse to copse, cave to cave,
until our fears were sapped by weariness
of muscle, blood and brain. We clung
to one another like halves of an empty shell,
not out of love, but desperation, need.

But in this empty shell, a miracle
conceived. The birth of that one child,
Seth, was sunlight, the clouds dispersed,
skies opened, the earth transformed
from cave to field and hill and valley.
We woke and rose as from a grave.
And then we remembered the words
of promise spoken at our banishment,
the thick sediment of fear was lifted
from our minds and, weeping tears
like rain, we remembered Paradise,
the Serpent, the scarlet cord of blood
that flowed from Abel's stone-crushed
head—without ourselves being crushed.

The crushing weight of memory,
as deep and dark as all the sleepless,
mute, impassive nights of banishment,
is shattered now by light, by stars
that speak unceasingly like angels
to strike hope from fearful hearts below.
The words that crushed like hammer
blows now strike off chains, shatter
bonds that once impeded even blood
to cry to blood. See, the fragile veins
that map the temple of this newborn
child are mine, are yours: they pump
new life from this—Yahweh's own heart—
to all who've cried in pain, in hope
to make them God's own seed.

The Lineage of Christ

Abraham

The path from Ur to this village
is farther than my feet can walk,
farther even than that infinitely
long climb up that steep, steep
mountain with my silent son,
my only son, Isaac, beside me.
We were always traveling,
it seemed, never sure where
to stop, to call a halt, drifting
endlessly like the sifting sands.

Only the stars, yes, the stars your
hands tossed like bright seeds
against the black soil of sky
to grow there like flowering gems–
only they were my tent, my home,
my tabernacle. The dreams, the hopes
they held for this weary, footsore
immigrant! Such impossible prom-
ises....
True, my herds of sheep and camels
grew, as did the size of my tents,
until we were a travelling village.
But even after I became a wealthy
patriarch, what was I but a nomad?

After all those visions and promises,
what was a handful of cattle to me?
Even if all the stars in the night sky
had tumbled down into my hands as
jewels,
my hands would have grown cold, old,
grasping at grains of desert sand
like the claws of some carrion bird.
When I looked down at Isaac
and met his mute, puzzled gaze,
my God, my God, my bones burned
and melted. And now I see–I see
the same deep eyes looking up at me,
deeper than the star-struck sky
shimmering with promise–and tears.
And here I stand in a drafty shed
beside a manger, while outside
an insignificant race scurries to
and fro like sands driven by wind
because some distant Ceasar speaks
with the voice of ancient gods.
My people, people of promise,
oblivious to this birth, to the hymnody
overhead of vibrant, whirling stars
streaming down threads of glory,
yellow, blue and scarlet threads of
glory glory glory! Hear, Sarah, hear
the laughter of God's great glory.

Star of the Nativity

... continued from page 19

Already early in the novel Pastemak confronts the reader with the meaning of Christ and Christianity. He does this by means of a short but deeply questioning dialogue in which Nikelai Nikolaievich, the young Yura's uncle, proposes to rescue the meaning of Christ from oblivion in modem times.

He says, "...One must be true to Christ. I'I1 explain. What you don't understand is that it is possible to be an atheist, it is possible not to know whether God exists, or why, and yet believe that man does not live in a state of nature but in history, and that history as we know it now began with Christ, and that Christ's Gospel is its foundation.

What is history?

"Now what is history? It is the centuries of systematic explorations of the riddle of death, with a view to overcoming death. That's why people discover mathematical infinity and electromagnetic waves, that's why they write symphonies. Now, you can't advance in this direction without a certain faith. You can't make such discoveries without spiritual equipment. And the basic elements of this equipment are in the Gospels. What are they? To begin with, love of one's neighbor, which is the supreme form of vital energy. Once it fills the heart of man it has to overflow and spend itself. And then the two basic ideals of free personality and the idea of life as sacrifice... It until after the coming of Christ that time and man could breathe freely. It was not until after Him that men began to live toward the fixture."

So after 10 pages we know that some people are not willing to accept the materialist ideology nor do they think it can succeed in a human way. If materialism succeeds (Marxist or capitalist), it will destroy humanity. As we read through the novel and the poems it contains, the amazing thing that Pasternak accomplishes in the midst of 20th century secularism is to remind us that the religious question is still important.

The question of the coming of Christ was so important for Pasternak that he does not entrust this to some minor dialogues, but rather to some very central conversations in the novel, and underscores this even more strongly in the novel's poetry: the poems which end the novel refer to Christ as the judge of history.

Religious depth in Zhivago's poems

One might think that the novel is about a medical doctor, but it is really about Zhivago the poet and lover of life. Poetry is close to the deepest feelings, yearnings and dramatic impulses of our life, our human instincts, our flesh and our ideals. The order of the poems moves from Spring through Summer, Fall and Winter.

The poems concentrate on seasons, on nature, on human relations and on religion. Just as there is a cycle of seasons, so the church year is also present. The secret behind several of them seems to be the Advent of Christ. One could say that Pasternak borrows this Advent theme (and the theme of resurrection) as a parallel symbol to his own message about individual freedom, the poetic depths of life and death, the celebration of life and the hope for better times.

Christ and the Mother of God: *"Pasternak wrote about the Russian Revolution as "a god come down to earth from heaven," but he chose the Advent of Christ as more real, that is, of eternal significance."*

But we cannot say that it is only a symbol. At crucial points the reminder of eternity is strong. And when Yurii and Lara part for the last time, he says, "Farewell, Lara, until we meet in the next world, farewell, my love, my inexhaustible, everlasting joy."

This combination of the carnal and the spiritual is one of the strongest themes in the novel. The whole story begins and ends with a funeral. Zhivago as a person in the novel ends up "going to seed," losing the skills and depth of interest he had as a doctor, a poet and philosopher. The novel is an exercise in both the celebration of life and a mourning of the sadness of finitude and the political tragedies of false ideological choices.

The poems continue to speak about divine grace, help and the triumph of Christ over death in the face of a broken, sinful, unjust and rather hopeless world. Pasternak wrote about the Russian Revolution as "a god come down to earth from heaven," but he chose the Advent of Christ as more real, that is, of eternal significance.

He knew that he had to choose between the Star of the Nativity and the star of the Kremlin. The heaven on earth promised by the Revolution was a heresy. Or as expressed in the novel, all deep passion (love) for life needs to be connected to the Passion (suffering love) of Christ.

A Creation startled

In Star of the Nativity there are lines which describe the star of Bethlehem as

almost a natural phenomenon among the things of this world, while yet emphasizing that the star and the Christ are a miracle among us. The emphasis on the graveyard is a way of saying that in this world we find death, in Christ's coming we find life.

Far off were fields covered over with snow,
And a graveyard, and gravestones and fences,
A cart with its shafts deep in a snowdrift
And, over the graveyard, a star-studded sky.

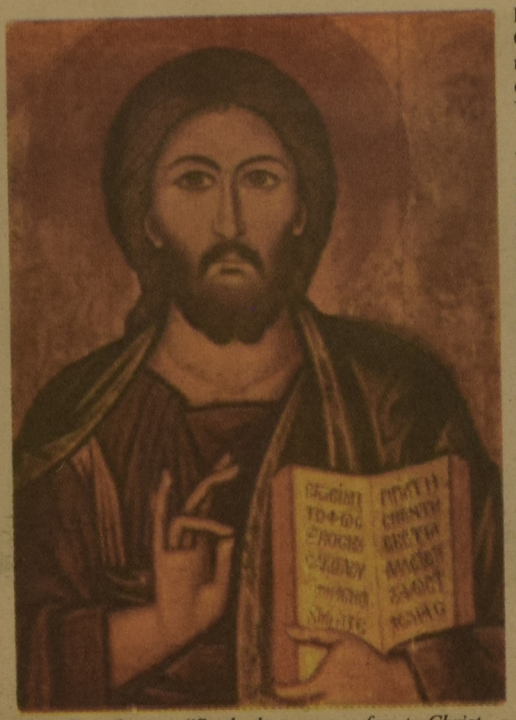
And seemingly near yet unseen until then,
Its light more timorous than that of a tallow-dip
Set in the window of some watchman's hut,
A star glimmered over the road to Bethlehem.
Now it looked like a hayrick blazing
Off to one side from heaven and God;
Like the reflection of an arsonous fire,
Like a farmstead in flames or a threshing floor burning.

It reared in the sky like a fiery stack
Of straw, of hay,
In the midst of a Creation startled, astounded
By this new Star.

That star, Christ himself, comes from afar, and at first is not seen (for who he is). But his coming soon blazes up like a great light and fire in the history of the world. All Creation is amazed to see God-with-us in this way. For those who know T.S.Eliot's famous poem *Journey of the Magi*, there are some interesting parallels (and differences). Eliot ends his poem emphasizing the great historical and cultural impact of the Incarnation. One of the Wisemen, telling the story or their journey many years later, says that he hardly knows if they went to see birth or death:

Other gods become alien

Eliot emphasizes the shock which the Incarnation brings to other religions, dismissing all other gods as aliens. The Magi found that their old culture and faith had become alien. Faith in Christ revises our whole outlook on history, on culture, on the world.



Christ Pantokrator: *"So the last poem refers to Christ.... Christ shall judge the centuries. This is a clear challenge to all ideologies and to political leaders."*

This also very much in the perspective of Pasternak when he wrote about Christ as the root of history, the fountain of freedom and a new ethos. But Pasternak ends his poem, speaking of the Magi present at the manger: The Magi stood in shadow (the byre seemed in twilight):

They spoke in whispers, groping for words.
Suddenly one, in deeper shadow, touched another
To move him aside from the manger, a little to the left.
The other turned: like a guest about to enter,
The Star of the Nativity was gazing upon the Maid.

Whereas Eliot's poem is typically reformationally Protestant, talking about the cultural renewal of the Christian faith, Pasternak's is more Eastern Orthodox, talking about the mystery of the presence of the divine in the tri-unity of Star, Virgin and Child.

Pasternak reminds us that we must all come out of the shadows of sin and death to the Light. So Rembrandt painted a Nativity scene in which the light does not come from outside but from the face of the holy child in the manger. Ferenci Karoly painted a wonderful scene of the Magi crossing through the shadows of the woods: are they coming out the dark to the light, or going back, as Eliot said, to the darkness of another dispensation?

In the novel, there are a number of specific references to the Incarnation of Christ. One of them, after talking about Mary Magdalene washing Jesus' feet with her hair and receiving great mercy for her many sins, says, "What familiarity, what equality between God and life, God and the individual, God and a woman!" The last poem of the Pasternak series, and the closing words of the novel, reach a great zenith of religious clarity and ideological choice. Christ is praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, and the prayer as well as the novel ends saying:

I shall descend into my grave. And on the third day rise again.
And, even as rafts float down a river,
So shall the centuries drift, trailing like a caravan,
Coming for judgment, out of the dark, to me.

Christ, Judge of the Centuries

So the last poem refers to Christ. This was an amazing way to end such a novel written in Russia at a time when all such thoughts were anathema. Pasternak says: *Christ shall judge the centuries*. This is a clear challenge to all ideologies and to political leaders. Pasternak, pushed to the limits of the possible choices, says: history does not function by a material dialectic alone, but under the grace and judgment of Christ.

So it turns out that the Star of Bethlehem, the Advent of Christ, announces the greatest meaning, the greatest joy and freedom, as well as the greatest standard (judgment) for human life and history.

There was a kind of ideological death and resurrection which Pasternak saw taking place in Russia. He dared to say that there is a divine secret to history: the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

Frank Sawyer teaches theology the Reformed seminary in Sarospatak, Hungary.

Illustrations are ancient Russian icons of unknown origin.

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth...
John 1:14a

May the reality of the Incarnation be the source of your celebration this Christmas!

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The Lineage of Christ

Tamar

My beauty has been a curse
to me from the time my breasts
swelled into grapes, my ankles
learned to dance, and my hair,
black as a raven's wing, played
across my shoulder blades
like curtains in the women's tent.
My mother loved to brush my hair,
to make it shine with virgin oil,
perfume it with balsam and myrrh,
and tie it back with scarlet thread.

The boys followed me, boldly
admiring me, vying with each other
to get near when my father was away,
playing their ululating flutes
from the shelter of the night
until they drove my father mad.

Why does beauty promise so much
pleasure and deliver so much grief?
What does a young girl know
of the troubles her looks foment?

Oh, how my mother and I wept
when Hiram ordered me married off
to foreigners just to keep the peace
among his sons. Strange world:
for how I wept again two years
later when I was sent back thence
to my father's tent, barren,
cut off from the promises of God.

See, the scarlet cord of Judah's seal
I used to tie myself to him, to you.
I am so ashamed, unworthy to be
standing here, inserting myself
among these bearded patriarchs
by sly deceit and trickery. But
I've tied the cord around my wrist
lest God forget his handmaid,
just as I tied it round the wrist
of my first-born son, that you,
my Lord, might know him too as yours.
See, here, I yield it now to you, a gift,
that you may tie me and all my line
in covenant with you, my bond.

The lineage of Christ

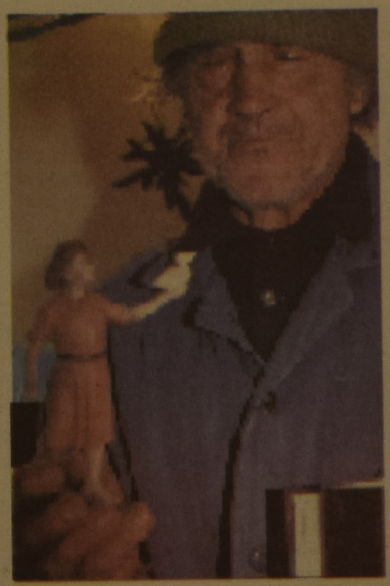
Rahab

Some call me sour as a pickled rind,
an old palm-bark woman, taunting
me just to hear me scold and rail.
But it's not that I have not known
gladness and gratitude, not remembered
and felt again that awesome, awful
finger unravelling my deepest soul
that day three dusty strangers
rolled in through my open door,
their faces aghast like thieves sentenced
to mutilation. I, too, was a stranger
among my own people, a colorful
insect on a wall waiting to be crushed.
Was it bitterness, years of nursed
resentment, that prompted me to hide
those trembling wretches on my roof?

No, a strange, wild, uncultivated
hope flared up in me and I flung
it from my narrow, darkened window
like a lifeline, like the scarlet cord
that was their salvation–and mine.
Yes, they took me in, but I—
I guess I can't really blame them—
the women never really accepted
the foreign harlot, betrayer of her own.
The ruins, the rubble, the fires,
the stench of a thousand carcasses...
They were etched upon my face
for all to read. And to turn away.

I did get a husband from Israel,
a gentle, sickly man; and at last
my twisted cord gave life to hope–
Boaz, my son, was born to us,
even as my husband lay dying.
And see how far my scarlet cord
has reached, through fortress walls,
from Canaanite to Israelite, across
a thousand years, and now I know
my act of hope was not madness
or despair, but born of God.
And although my rind is rough,
my heart is glad. When Boaz, my son,
my living cord, was born, Listen, they said,
laughing, listen: the harlot, the foreigner,
the betrayer of her people, she
with the tongue of thorns–she sings!

Communism and Christmas in the Czech Republic



Jaroslav Benda

James Drake

In the tiny Central Bohemian hamlet of Jerusalem, named for the town where Christ met his death, this glorious representation of the Savior's birth bears witness to the enduring power of faith over the false prophets of Communism.

Czechs have been carving their traditional wooden nativity scenes, known as "Betlems," (Bethle-hems), for centuries. But strung out along a trestle table in Jaroslav Benda's attic workroom, and ushered on their way by angels hanging from the ceiling, it's as if the whole town has turned out to greet the new arrival. Tiny citizens from all walks of life – bakers, bagpipe players, merchants, servants, kings – converge on the holy stable with their dogs, sheep, goats, geese, horses and cows in tow.

Between them they run the full gamut of human frailties and virtues: some are drunk and carousing, others bustle along with pious intent. Many are singing, juggling or telling jokes; while a few are dawdling reluctantly, wondering what all the fuss is about. All, however, bring something to the party, whether it be gold, frankincense and myrrh … or just a basketful of apples, say, or a sackful of flour. "From each according to his means," their 70-year-old creator chuckles ironically, echoing the Marxist mantra that has shaped – and blighted – his adult life.

Benda was 20 when the communists seized power in 1948. Having taken out a post-war loan to improve the small dairy he inherited from his father, he was branded a "social parasite" by the new regime and sent to the uranium mines where he contracted the cancer that has periodically returned to torment him ever since. During the five years he spent underground, he whittled away when he could, secretly, in the dark.

After he returned to Jerusalem, he was assigned menial jobs on the collective farm that had expropriated his family's property. "We were shunned, humiliated, sworn at. No one would talk to us," hisses Ludmila, Benda's unmarried daughter, now aged 44, who remained behind after her siblings left home to nurse her ailing father. "I'm bitter, I have no time for our neighbors. But Dad always refused to hate anyone."

Instead, surrounded by informers and petty jealousy, Benda resolved to create his own, better society, hiding his statuettes for safekeeping in the belfry of the Catholic church next door, where many succumbed to damp. His very first piece – a pink, fat, joyful infant Jesus – is cracked and streaked where the colors have run.

"Look what they did to him," croaks Benda, tears welling up behind his thick pebble spectacles. "It's as if they spat on Our Lord himself … and on the child I was when I carved him."

In fact, each addition to the 900-strong entourage tracks Benda's spiritual and physical development. He took up his hobby when he was eight, fashioning imitations of people around him with a pocket knife and a chisel made from a castoff umbrella. The earliest figures, which seem to echo the two-dimensional ingenuousness of the medieval artisan before the discovery of perspective, date from the prosperous inter-war period that Czechs now see as a time of innocence, a golden age.

Later efforts are sharper and more emotionally defined. Perhaps his most powerful work was executed during his time on the cancer wards in the early 1950s, when the resident nuns smuggled him bits of scrap wood from the hospital boiler room. Today, as Benda's sight fails and arthritis sets in, his latest offerings have reverted to the moon-faced naivete of his boyhood work.

But to Benda, they are all living people. He tut-tuts indulgently over a shepherd boy who is sleeping under a palm tree, and chides a group of minstrels who have stopped to bicker about which song they should play to the Christ Child. "Just look at them," he clucks indulgently. "If they don't hurry up they'll miss the show completely!"

His favorite likeness, though, is of a young woman holding a dove: the bird symbolizes peace; the girl is modeled on Benda's childhood sweetheart. "We were engaged to be married, but she dropped me when the Bolsheviks came, just like that. I'm sorry...," he breaks off, wiping his eyes again. "Each one brings back memories, usually bad ones. My son says I should get rid of them, since they upset me so much."

PHOTOS BY MICHAEL MOSBY

It's as well for the world that he hasn't. Until the early 1900s, the head of every Czech peasant household was expected to carve a "betlem" for his family. The advent of godless socialism helped put paid to that. Today, Benda is one of the few remaining exponents of a tradition that goes back to the arrival of Christianity around the turn of the second millennium.

"This is part of our cultural heritage: genuine living folk art of a kind that is about to become extinct," mourns Nada Valaskova, an anthropologist at the Czech Ethnological Institute. "Mr. Benda is the last of a long line."

He's had the last laugh, too. As the craftsman says goodbye at the front door, a gaggle of elderly villagers standing by the bus stop cease their gossiping and look over, the sneers visible on their faces from 20 yards.

No matter, shrugs the grand old man. His monument will endure long after the lies of Marx and Lenin have faded from memory. "Actually, I feel sorry for the folk around here. They wasted their lives pursuing a shabby illusion," Benda remarks. "No one can say that about me."

James Drake is a freelance journalist based in Prague, covering Central Europe and the Balkans. He writes for Business Week *and also regularly files stories for the* Boston Globe, Christian Science Monitor, *the BBC, CBS radio and the* Times of London.

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Christmas under persecution

Michelin Nativity: *"Christmas is a time when we give God thanks for the greatest Gift he ever gave us. But the enemy will always do its worst to spoil our joy."*

Genovieva Sfatcu Beattie

Christmas is a time when we give God thanks for the greatest Gift he ever gave us. But the enemy will always do its worst to spoil our joy. In Romania, the communists tried year after year to stop this celebration, and dictator Ceausescu had his mind set on making Christmas illegal.

It was Dec. 20, 1975. I was 24 at that time, living by myself at the church. During the day I would clean the building, and at night I slept there in semi-hiding.

From the piano to the lower branches of the fir tree there were two long poles. On them I hung about 150 baskets with gifts, made by hand by myself, my brother Teodor, and Silvia. We made these baskets by cutting the parts out of cardboard, sewing them together and covering them with red, green and blue fringed crepe paper. I then filled them with candies, cookies and nuts, and worked hard to give joy to all the children who would come. The children's choir I led had diligently learned 10 carols.

Government the only educator

Suddenly there was a knock at the door. There stood Mr. Andrunic, the inspector of religion. He took a look inside the church and then, without taking his hands out of his black leather coat pockets, said angrily, "I came to tell you again, Miss Genovieva, as I told your father and the pastor: 'Get that Christmas tree out of the church!'"

He was a scrawny man, in his late 50s, and he always wore dark glasses and a hat. "It attracts too many children to the church," he added. "The government is the only authority allowed to educate children in our country."

He always likes to threaten us, I thought, watching him disappear down the street.

I remembered when I was a little girl. I could not wait for Christmas to come. I would gaze at the decorations, and I liked it when sister Maria put off all the lights and lit the candles on the Christmas tree. Then we would all sing "Silent Night." After that she would give us each a basket full of gifts. There would be a piece of Turkish delight, several fondant candies wrapped in foil, a vanilla cookie, a nut and a tangerine. It was hard to find sweets in the shops at Christmas time. And fir trees and candles appeared just before New Year's Eve. The same was true for flour, vanilla and yeast which we used for baking.

One year the secret police had arrested many teenagers as they were coming home from Christmas programs. They were taken to the police station and beaten. Another time, while we were caroling, they followed us with police dogs. I wondered what they were going to do this year.

Three prophetic dreams

Last Sunday Pastor Radu had read fom Revelation 22:14: "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city."

After that service my aunt had told me: "I dreamt of a beautiful sunset. What could it mean?" And the pastor's wife came to me too: "I dreamt that a snake bit my husband on his right temple. Pray for us!" Later the same day, old sister Boca also told me: "I had a strange dream. We were in the church. There were three chairs behind the pulpit and the one in the middle was hit by un unseen hand. It broke in pieces and fell to the floor."

Two days passed: December 22, 8 a.m. The church gate and door were locked. I had had a late night and was still sleeping on a bench with my clothes and boots on. I was awakened by a loud knock at the gate and someone shouting, "Hello!"

I went outside. A police officer spoke through the fence. "Do you know someone by the name of Radu Cruceru? He was found dead in the forest. His body is at the morgue and we found this address on his papers."

I ran home as fast as I could. My family were the first to see the pastor's body lying on that cold marble bed, wounded on the right temple, surrounded by secret police. After Pastor Radu's body was brought into the church for the viewing my father and brothers put on plastic gloves and examined the clothes and shoes he had on when shot.

"The clothes are full of blood on the right side," my father said, "and the blood went into his right shoe. It seems that he was beaten while standing up, or else he stood up after being hit. On the Judgment Day his blood will be avenged." Then my father wrote a report about his death. "Hide it," he instructed me. I hid the report with the archives of the church.

On December 24, the pastor's body was transported to another town for the funeral Many from the church went along to comfort his wife. This murder was very well prepared to spoil our Christmas, I thought. So much preparation, and now it all seems in vain.

"You should take the Christmas tree and throw it in the back garden," brother Ion suggested to me. "It is now a time of mourning."

But I was uncomfortable with his suggestion. This man was an informer for the secret police, and we knew it. He would stand up uninvited in church and pray something like: "Thank You, Lord, for the beautiful freedom we have in our country."

"I will see about that," I said. "I will have to talk with my father. Now that the pastor is dead, he is the one responsible."

Nothing can stop us

Suddenly I remembered the Scripture: "I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people." Quickly I cleaned the church, brought in fir branches, made a fire in the stove, lit the candles in the windows, and turned on the tree lights. *The police need to learn that nothing can stop us from giving glory to God for the birth of our Savior,* I thought.

When 5 o'clock came the church was already full of people and the Sion Children's Choir took their seats up front. Dozens of other children came. Old pastor Asiev, full of the Lord, went to the pulpit. He preached on the joy of Christmas. Then the organ and guitars began to play the first Christmas carol.

We celebrated with much joy that evening. I learned that if Satan tries to stop us giving God the praise we owe at Christmas time, or any time, we shouldn't allow him to succeed.

Fourteen years later, President Ceausescu, the man who hated Christmas, was executed, along with his wife, Elena, on Christmas Day 1989.

Genovieva Sfatcu Beattie lived in Romania from her birth in 1951 to 1980, when she was received into the United States as a political refugee. Her family were persecuted in Romania for distributing Bibles. At present she works full time with Eastern Europe Aid Association, an interdenominational mission based in Waynesboro, Pa., which assists Romanian orphans.

The lineage of Christ

Ruth

Oh, Naomi, my mother, come stand here beside me: see the fruit of your womb, how he gazes up at us as if he knows us. How infinitely far we've come from Moab, from dispossession and death, to little Bethlehem, the house of bread, of life itself; and your God and mine has filled, and filled again these vessels that were empty of all but hope. No more barren womb, mother; no more wails of bitterness.

You and I, poor women without a name, without a share in Israel, we gleaned the margins of the fields beside the crows, stooping all day long under the scorching sun till we were brown and dry as nuts. Who would have thought they'd call us mothers to a king? I laugh–laugh like Sarah, laugh like my mother-in-law when she bore Boaz, my husband, my redeemer, laugh as you laughed when I put Obed in your lap. See, this scarlet cord that Boaz used to wear about his waist: it's Rahab's cord. He gave it me to wear when we were wed. Always remember, he said, that you and I were gleaned by God; this cord was a lifeline for my mother and me, and now it's also yours.

What wonders have been weaved in Israel and in the nations all about with cords of life that lead like streams to Bethlehem. Almighty God above is spinning thread of scarlet, gold and starlight from his own glory with thread of human flesh and blood to stitch and weave himself into the dark fabric and tapestry of our torn apart and scattered tribes and races and so by force to knit us into one.

The lineage of Christ

David

My God! The Son of David,
the Promised One, the Deliverer
of Israel, the One anointed
to rule the nations with God's
own sceptre–born here?
Oh, how my lovely Bathsheba
would have wept to see
our royal seed ground down
so low. The Lord indeed has built
a house for David's dynasty
in Bethlehem–a cattle shed.
The Lord engenders dreams, and then
he gives us both less and more–
a broken path to his unfathomable self.

It was here, in these selfsame hills,
I learned my life was not my own
by herding stubborn, hapless sheep,
and waiting patiently for God
to weave my scarlet thread
into his many-colored tapestry.
From hero and royal court to fugitive
and outlaw, banished at last
beyond the bounds of holy Israel–
an outcast, criminal, with no place
to lay my head except in shadows,
in the sepulchral depth of caves.

Will you, frail scion of my stock,
be raised up high from this dark
cave to rule one day upon a throne?

The coldness and the dark have seeped
into my bones, my mind. My blood
congeals with apprehensions strange....
But see here come some shepherds,
jostling one another, blathering like
sheep.
And speaking of visions and angels
who announced the birth of this poor
child
anointed to save the Lord's own sheep!

Listen, they give me back the words
of my own tongue: all nations will be
blessed through him, and they will call
him blessed. All the ends of the earth
will remember and turn to the Lord,
and all the families of the nations
will bow down before him–
the Son of David, the Prince of Peace.

The Gift

Walfried Goossen

Jim Markle dragged his bent body slowly down the street as if he had nowhere to go. He did not look an even six feet. A big black wave of hair hung over his forehead almost hiding his right eye. A worn overcoat protected his slender frame from the cold. As he walked he stared at the sidewalk.

He was on his way to his parents' house for Christmas dinner, but he was in no hurry. He didn't want to arrive sooner than he had to. Jim had left his room at the boarding house early only because he couldn't stand being alone any longer with his tormenting thoughts.

He seldom stayed in his room long. It was stifling, with only a small window framed by a set of old purple curtains which clashed rudely with the shiny yellow walls.

His door always remained closed. He did not appreciate interruptions by other boarders, although he was usually doing nothing but lying on his bed ruminating, going over and over his unhappy life. When he could stand it no longer he would jump up from his bed and bolt out the door.

He was coming empty-handed. He had come to God empty-handed, but God hadn't noticed. His family would. He had no gifts.

This would be a different Christmas than what he was used to in the psychiatric hospital. Christmas Eve and Christmas Day nearly half the patients went home. For five Christmases he had sat in the darkness of his room, staring at the silent night or pacing the ghostly halls.

Now he looked upward suddenly. The stars and moon stood motionless in the heavens as if all of creation had stopped to watch the celebrations on earth, he told himself. As he trudged along he found it difficult to believe he was actually *out*. This was to be his first Christmas with his family after so many spent by himself.

When he first became ill his whole world fell apart. His best friend visited him once; never again. Perhaps Eddy was disturbed by Jim's anxiety and his compulsive pacing. Perhaps he was just too busy, or just afraid. Even now, Eddy's desertion hurt dim.

His family visited him regularly, especially his parents. But these visits were often fraught with arguments. Why was he ill? he would wonder. Whose fault was it? Why didn't he pull himself together? The mixture of pain and joy made these visits as difficult as the long periods of lonely isolation between them.

Although he had attended church services at the hospital he had soon abandoned churchgoing after his release. People at church were nice enough, but they were always asking him how he was; always feeling sorry for him, always giving advice. Why couldn't they just accept him as a normal human being? Why didn't they let him forget? Or was it just his own sensitivity? Did *he* not let them forget?

Whenever he told them that he had found renewed faith, that he didn't need material things as he used to, they indicated by not too subtle words and gestures that they didn't believe him. It was just sour grapes. He was jealous, they claimed, because they thought him a failure. But he had been ill, he told himself. How could he succeed or fail at anything? And why should they be surprised that his suffering had taught him that the words of the Scriptures are true?

The gulf between him and "society" seemed enormous. His every action, thought and statement apparently had hidden meanings and ulterior motives. Challenged at church to be himself, the self he was received a mixed reception.

These thoughts filled his troubled mind as he dragged his feet along. He was apprehensive about tonight's dinner. In a way he was excited. He was looking forward to being a part of the family again, to being a whole, normal, person again. But he was an ex-psychiatric patient and no one who knew him would ever forget it – least of all he. The label was permanent.

The rest of the family would, of course, be dressed in their best for this special occasion. Under his frayed coat he wore a suit eight years old, bought for five dollars at a thrift store. The others would exhange gifts. He would receive, but be unable to give. His meager pension left him broke after rent and groceries.

He was coming empty-handed. He had come to God empty-handed, but God hadn't noticed. His family would. He had no gifts, no money, no achievements, no poise or social graces. Actually he did have the latter, but they were hidden behind the stigma, waiting for a time when he regained confidence in himself, and his self-respect, his wit and sense of humor would be set free again.

The hours he had spent in the hospital listening to other patients' problems, at times offering sound common-sense advice to a few staff members who saw more in him than most and confided in him – that didn't count. Had he been a hospital employee, or even a trained counselor, he would have received a good paycheque for doing the same thing. But, as it was, he was a patient, and when he had cleaned the hospital floors he was merely doing "work therapy."

His thoughts re-emerged in the present. Worst of all, he knew that his family's conversation around the dinner table would largely exclude him. What could he talk about? About his job, wife, children – none of which existed? Perhaps he could talk about his symptoms. But everyone had heard his story a hundred times. He, too, was weary of it. He didn't follow the news enough to be able to talk politics or social events, and besides, what did he, the ex-nutcase know about such things? Would they take him any more seriously than the people at church did?

They would be polite, of course, and avoid asking questions such as, "What have you been doing lately, Jim?", so as not to embarrass him. "Doing things" meant work, making a recreation room, for example, in your house. It meant a fishing trip, or taking a course at the local university. Whatever it was he did, everyone knew he didn't "do anything." He had an easy existence on a government pension. Remembering the pity in their voices, he was tempted to turn back to his room.

As he walked he glanced up and saw several last-minute shoppers running in and out of a variety store. What did Christmas mean to them and to the shopkeeper? Did they really understand the Divine Love which they pretended to celebrate at this time each year? Did they really know what it was to be loved by God? Had they ever cried out to him in total despair when they felt the whole world had rejected them?

His years of suffering had given him a new perspective on life, and on faith. Whatever the future held, he was determined he would live it for God. But people didn't seem to understand his kind of faith. Apparently he didn't have the credibility to disdain the sham which was so often denounced from the pulpit by Christians who, nevertheless, lived very comfortably. A good job and a healthy bank account were required before his convictions about materialism could be accepted as valid. Pity for the poor and disdain of wealth were luxuries to be enjoyed only by the well off.

Since his sinking and re-emerging from that emotional abyss, he was often astonished at the superficiality of so many lives. Even people he had once admired seemed caught up in pettiness and futile ambitions. His greatest fear in recovering was that he, too, would become like that – again. The "old man" might still be lurking in his heart. But Christmas had a new meaning for him now. It was real; the Christ Child was real.

A gentle snow started to wrap the world in white; just for Christmas, he thought. Familiar carols echoed from a loudspeaker over the door of the store he was passing. Immersed in his thoughts he didn't notice how quickly the blocks passed under his feet. He could see his parents' white house in the distance now.

Jim hadn't seen his brothers, Robert and Danny,and his sister, Irene for months, nor their children. He checked his memory. Bobby was 10, Jenny was nine, Theresa, six.

Robert and Danny were twins, five years older than Jim, and partners in a thriving pizza outlet which kept them from family activities, and from him. Irene was content to be a housewife and Theresa's mother. In all they numbered 12. He felt more fear of his nephews and niece than of anyone else. They were probably ashamed of him. Did the kids in the school yard tease them about

Short Story/Lineage of Christ

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"There seemed to be a particular bond between him and his youngest niece. It was as if she sensed his loneliness because she was lonely too. Once she had said to him, 'You know, Uncle Jim, you're my best friend in the whole world.' His heart had melted."

their uncle? But, likely, they were instructed not to talk about him at school.

Whenever the children had visited him in the hospital, he had always resisted the impulse to grab them and hug them. What if they moved away from him? They seemed so distant as they stared at him silently. Or was that just because they were told to keep quiet and sit down?

Theresa, especially, seemed to look at him with longing. Her face (it appeared angelic to him) was framed by dark wavy hair. She would ask her father: "Is Uncle Jim coming home soon?" But she'd receive no answer. When she would arrive with her family she would never fail to say a shy, "Hi, Uncle Jim." When they left she would always say goodbye. It was when she added softly one day, "I love you," that he felt as if something had pierced his side. He would recall the times he had played with Theresa when she was a baby. And then – the illness. He had become imprisoned within himself and everything changed.

There seemed to be a particular bond between him and his youngest niece. It was as if she sensed his loneliness because she was lonely too. Once she had said to him, "You know, Uncle Jim, you're my best friend in the whole world." His heart had melted. It sounded funny, affectionate, precocious. But she meant it.

Now they spoke to each other with their eyes, neither quite sure what the other was saying. When they left the hospital she would look back at him and wave several times until she got to the car.

Perhaps today, on Christmas Day he would do it! He would give in to that terrible longing to throw his arms around the kids and hug them with all his might and tell them he loved them, and his brothers and sisters and parents as well. How long had it been since he embraced any of them?

He quickened his pace but slowed down immediately, remembering that he had no gifts. He was ashamed.

There would be no hugging and affectionate joshing – just the awkward rustling of paper as he opened his gifts, hoping that none of the children would ask what he had gotten them.

Suddenly he was standing in front of the huge white house, knocking on the door. Waiting. He never just walked in, though he knew the others did. His mother answered the door, ushering him in with a smile. She showed no trace of the suffering his illness had caused her, at least not in her attitude, not today anyway. How much of her gray hair was he responsible for?

"Come in, dear! Why didn't you just come right in? I'm so glad you decided to come. How are you?"

He bit his lip. It was true. With him, they could never be sure. As he hung his coat in the front hall, he nodded to the others who were gathered in the living room. Encouraged by the cheerful greeting that met him, he went in. They might not be proud of him, but they probably loved him.

His father beckoned to him and glanced at the big leather chair near the French doors. His father was retired and gaining a bit of weight and losing more hair.

There, under the Christmas tree across the room were the dreaded gifts – all but his gifts for the others. On a table beside the tree the Christ Child lay in a manger, surrounded by farm animals.

Dinner was sumptuous. He chewed his food slowly, wishing the meal would go on forever, wanting to postpone the embarrassment which awaited him. They weren't expecting anything from him, hadn't for years. It was not a comforting thought.

With dinner completed, his father at last spoke those fateful words: "Let's go into the livingroom and see what Santa brought us!"

The children jumped up and ran to the tree, and the adults hastened after them

Continued on page 26...

The lineage of Christ

Joseph

My blood was beating in my ears
like a drum. I had to escape a while
to gather my storming thoughts
and calmmy spirit.
It's quiet now inside;
the child's asleep and Mary's
so full of all she's seen,
she seems complete within herself –
aglowalmost like the star
arrested overhead.

Even now when all the visitors have left,
the place felt crowded as the temple,
echoing with voices, visions, angels,
until, well, I felt almost crowded out.
It's good to sit here under the stars,
my back against the shed's warm wall,
and whittle wood. It's no bad thing to be
a carpenter, to make things
with your hands.
How, in heaven's name, how is a simple,
uneducated man to raise a child
like this?

Angel assurances notwithstanding,
to put aside all doubts, ignore the whispers,
the looks has not been easy. If the women
could have seen what happened here
tonight, a night of visions and prophecy,
but- hah!- even I can hardly credit what
my eyes have seen. I wish I could talk
to my father Heli. But what could I say
to convince a plain and sober Nazarite
like him my son is the long awaited one?
He thought me proud when I left the farm
to become a carpenter. I should be proud,
I guess, but I feel like one waylaid,
like one caught in a landslide of stars
and swept away into another world.

Perhaps that's why I was called Joseph,
the dreamer who was carried off to Egypt,
to a land of strange tongues and gods,
to become a prince in Pharaoh's court.
Yet, my strangeness is double strange,
for here I sit whittling beside a shed
in humble Bethlehem with angels
running all around like mothers and aunts
at a wedding.

Ah, see what my hands
have carved: a naked little lamb, the best
I've ever done. I'll tie this crimson cord
around its neck and hang it on the crib
for him to see. A joyful sadness rules
my soul, for although I'm a father, tonight
I feel as though I'm the newborn child,
for sure my eyes and ears have been reborn
and all the earth, the sky, the heavens–
they echo with the cries of startled birth.

Short Story/Lineage of Christ

The Gift

... continued from page 25

amidst groans and the din of scraping chairs. His father took charge of the distribution of the gifts and soon everyone was admiring each others' presents.

Unable to gaze continually at his feet, Jim noticed his nephews staring at him from the floor near the tree. He glanced down again at his new sweater, shirt and tie. The others were looking at him now too. "Thank you," he whispered, his guilt overriding any gratitude he felt. He was about to add, "I'm sorry I don't have anything for all of you," but checked himself.

Jim paused for a minute, hardly able to breath. Could he really make himself so important as to.... Then he leapt into the dark.

Theresa was standing beside the creche next to the tree. The lights from the tree reflected in her shining eyes. His heart sank. Of all the kids on earth, she was the one he didn't want to disappoint. He steeled himself to retain control.

He diverted his eyes to the creche and remembered – that Christ Child had given himself, had been *crucified* for him – and Theresa's question: "Is Uncle Jim coming home soon?"

Jim paused for a minute, hardly able to breath. Could he really make himself so important as to.... Then he leapt into the dark. "My ... my gift to you is," he paused and looked down at his feet, "...is myself."

The room seemed to spin and he felt claustrophobic. He grasped both arms of the recliner and shoved himself deep into it with trembling arms.

The entire family stared at him. He was sure he had made an idiot of himself. He wanted to explain further why he wasn't giving gifts, but he didn't have the courage to make himself more conspicuous after such an audacious statement. His heart thudded, thudded. He wiped his sweaty hands on his pants and fixed his eyes on his scuffed shoes. His Christmas, his life, was frozen for all time in silence.

After eons a dam finally burst. There was a chorus of, "We're glad you could make it, Jim," and then everyone broke out talking at once and he supposed they probably meant it, but they were so awkward and so ashamed for him.

He was about to try an explanation after all, when Theresa quite unexpectedly dropped the box she was holding and ran across the room to him. This beloved stranger threw her arms around his neck and kissed him and pressed her cheek against his. "Uncle Jim, you're my best Christmas present ever!" she said with typical childish enthusiasm. She gazed at him with glistening eyes and kissed and hugged him again.

Jim was speechless as he struggled to fight back tears, and held on to her almost leaving her breathless. She did not complain. How he had deprived her, and himself, because of his self-centred concerns. He often asked himself what good he was to anyone. It was so simple: "The greatest of these is love."

He knew his life would never be the same because of Christmas and a child.

Wally Goossen is a freelance writer who lives in Dundas, Ontario.

The lineage of Christ

Mary

And Mary said:
"My soul praises the Lord
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has been mindful
of the humble state of his servant.
From now on all generations will call me blessed,
for the Mighty One has done great things for me —
holy is his name.
His mercy extends to those who fear him,
from generation to generation.
He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.
He has brought down rulers from their thrones
but has lifted up the humble.
He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
remembering to be merciful
to Abraham and his descendants forever,
even as he said to our fathers.

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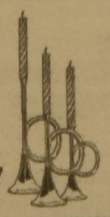

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As we reflect on the miracle of the Christ child coming into this world, let us also remember and pray for the many children living in poverty in Canada.

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Seasons **Food ? . . . for thought ? ?**

As the ***gentle*** **HEAT** from a fireplace will voluntarily bring dew worms out of a nearby moisture laden log,
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and... consistently surrounded with caring Christlike compassionate love!

A Blessed Christmas to you all!
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Advice

After a decade, they're putting away the shingle

For 10 years Peter and Marja Slofstra have been offering advice in answer to readers' questions on a variety of topics from scriptural to sexual. In the last year, the questions have waned. (We have joked that, after a decade, you all took the Slofstras' good advice and have run out of burning questions.)

Whatever the reason, 10 years is a long time, and we salute Peter and Marja's immense dedication to us and to you during that decade – yeoman's service. We heartily thank them and wish them God's continued blessing on their ministry and in all areas of their lives.

We print here their final advice, and their musings on their 10 years as the proprietors of "Peter and Marja are IN."

MVT

Dear Readers:

Ten years of advice. Now it's time to take down our shingle. We hope that our column has been helpful during the last decade. But it has run its course.

During those 10 years you asked us 425 questions. Those questions showed us that Reformed Christians deal with the same issues that confront human beings everywhere (if we had doubted it). The "sandwich generation" wrote out of concern for aging parents. Young people wondered how to help an abused or anorexic friend. Parents looked for ways to monitor what their children watched on television. Husbands and wives sought advice on how to keep their romance alive. Parishioners questioned the decisions of their church leaders. You asked about masturbation, cremation and salvation.

Some of our answers sparked more response than others. We defended the benefits of sabbaticals for pastors every seven years and upset those who thought that our clergy already had it better than others. We pointed out that divorced and remarried persons often found it difficult to find acceptance in our churches and provoked a deluge of letters from hurting folks who had been shunned after their marriages broke down. We urged parents to continue to love and accept their children after they became pregnant, began living common-law or came out of the closet with their homosexuality, and were thanked privately by many of you.

Certain issues were unique to us as a Reformed community. Readers from other traditions must have wondered why we often had a column about Sunday observance, dating unchurched friends and whether or not someone had committed the unpardonable sin. The things we worry about! The things these worries reveal about us as a People of the Word!

We tried to answer as People of the Word, too. By "we," we mean the various members of our advisory panel, for whom we are very grateful, as well as the two of us. Each letter was discussed from every angle. We tried to read between the lines. We brought our own experiences to bear. And we searched the Scriptures for that perfect verse which would put the icing on our advising.

It was never easy. We did not want people who wrote confidentially to be exposed. We did not want people who were already upset and confused to be even more so after reading our column. We did not want to become "situational ethicists" who never dared to say something black and white in a grey area. And we did not want to hurt our own church family, the Christian Reformed Church.

The fact that we often had little to go on also made it hard to know how to answer. It's hard to be "quick to listen, slow to speak" (James 1:19) when you only have a few paragraphs from someone you don't know. Consequently we often wondered whether or not we had given the best advice to those who wrote. We also wondered whether or not the advice got to you in time to make any difference, since we were bound to a publishing schedule which often saw answers in print weeks, even months, after a letter came into our file.

As this column concludes, we ask two things of you. First, we ask your forgiveness if our advice didn't help or even steered you in the wrong direction. We meant well, even when we took a confrontational approach. And secondly, we would really appreciate your sending us a note or card if something we said in answer to one of your questions made a difference. The fact is that we rarely heard back from the actual writers of the 425 questions which came in during the decade that our column ran. This often left us wondering not only what our readers, but also what each author of a question, thought of our advice.

In closing, we'd like to leave you a helpful tool that has guided our own decision-making over the years. Our last bit of advice, if you will. It's the word FOCUS, an acronym for a process that we prayerfully follow whenever we're faced with significant choices.

1. Gather as many **Facts** as you can about the choice that confronts you.

2. Consider all the **Options** that you have.

3. Carefully weigh the **Consequences** of taking each of those options.

4. Try to **Understand** your true motives or world-and-life-view.

5. Finally, arrive at a **Solution** to your dilemma.

As we said, this "focusing" process has been helpful whenever we have had to make a major decision, including our decision to retire from writing this advice column. Needless to say, it works best when you also pray a lot to God and talk a lot to family members, friends and others whose opinions you respect. As Proverbs 12:15 says: "The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise person listens to advice."

All in all, writing this column has been a positive experience for us. We thank God for the opportunity we had to address you in this format. Keep seeking advice from others who are "In." We'll do the same.

Peter and Marja Slofstra live in St. Catharines, Ontario. Peter is pastor of Jubilee Fellowship Christian Reformed Church there.

What's with these kids, anyway?

Dear P & M:

My wife and I are residents of a university's apartment complex. Although the residents are not necessarily Christians, the complex is affiliated with a Christian college. Also, residents are required to sign a community covenant (i.e., agree to respect neighbors, be aware of safety concerns, etc.)

While we enjoy living here for the most part, we are unsure what to do (if anything) regarding a community issue, namely the behavior of some of the children. Apart from typical noise levels associated with child's play, we have noticed a number of disturbing incidences:

- a five year old girl yells to her younger siblings: "Don't go too far away or you might get lost, and you could get murdered!"
- young boys roam the grounds playing war with guns, swords, yelling things like, "I shot you ... you're dead!" and "Kill! Kill!! Kill!!!"
- children rip branches from trees (sadly, in view of adults who often say nothing).
- young girls regularly scream and screech during play.

High noise levels are to be expected during activities such as tag, water balloon fights, etc. But we worry about the possibility of this screaming becoming so commonplace that a reaction to a real emergency might be tuned out.

We don't want to judge our neighbors, especially since we don't have children ourselves. But to do/say nothing doesn't seem appropriate either. Any suggestions?

Dear Disturbed by Kids' Behavior:

You enclosed the community covenant which all the residents signed. It says that your residence "provides resources to take counsel together under God's Word." That suggests to us that there may be weekly or monthly community meetings when matters that affect the community can be discussed. We advise you to attend such a meeting, if one is scheduled, and raise your concerns there.

The community covenant also asks the members of your residence to be constantly aware of safety, to show respect to others and to show respect for property. This seems to give you some responsibility for addressing misbehavior.

Two considerations, however, should give you pause. First, you want to be sure that the children are truly misbehaving. In our opinion, your four examples describe fairly typical behavior. The five-year-old girl had a safety concern for her little sister and what she said was true. The kids playing war, ripping branches and screaming are representative of children everywhere.

On our recent Thanksgiving hike with several church families, five boys with very different personalities were soon alternately pointing branches at each other and whacking leaves from trees as they ran whooping down the trail. The rest of us just smiled indulgently and wished for their kind of exuberance and imagination, glad for the resilience of the trees.

We are not suggesting that everything children do is acceptable. But it may be wise to check your perceptions with some of your friends or family members who have children to find out what is normal and innocent.

Secondly, you want to be careful about the ways you reprimand or correct someone else's children. Parents can be very sensitive about "interference" in their parenting, especially if they don't see a problem themselves. Proverbs 26:17 picturesquely warns us to mind our own business: "Like one who seizes a dog by the ears is a passer-by who meddles in a quarrel not his own." So make sure you talk to the parent first. And check with the community to see whether or not you will be appreciated for taking on some of the discipline when you see behavior that disturbs you.

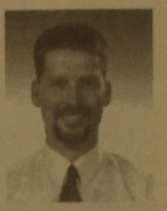
An African proverb suggests that it takes a whole village to raise a child. We live out that proverb when nursery attendants, Sunday school teachers, playground supervisors and church club leaders address the behavior of children not their own. You just want to be sure that the parents in your residence have this "village" ideal and that they share your concerns and welcome your intervention.

Peter & Marja

Comment

Do sports really matter?

Two Under 35



Elizabeth Salomons — Dirk Schouten

Dear Elizabeth,

This summer I was driving past downtown Toronto with some buddies. As we passed SkyDome, the home of the Blue Jays, we got into a conversation about the validity of professional sports. I thought I took a reasonable position – that professional sports are not inherently antithetical to creation but often become corrupted by greed. Another member of our group, however, had a different opinion. His thesis was short and simple: "Professional sports keep our minds off of the things that really matter."

A few weeks ago, I told a friend here in Korea about the SkyDome incident. He listened attentively, then chewed me out for allowing my buddy to argue the way he did. "Didn't you notice the presuppositions in his argument?" he said. "Of course they matter! Of course they're important!" I was confused.

This is personal. You see, Elizabeth, I'm a die-hard sports fan. I have been since I was a kid. At one time or another I knew every Stanley Cup team, every heavyweight champion, every Wimbleton champion, every Super Bowl MVP, every NBA scoring champion, every track and field world record holder, and every Mr. Olympia.

But knowing the names was never enough. I had to know the statistics as well. I believed (and still believe) that only in understanding the numbers can we grasp the profundity of the accomplishment. To this day, 29' 2", 19.32 seconds, 92 goals, 91 seconds, 100 points, and 560 pounds are numbers, distances and times of great importance to me. My family has even had good fortune in meeting world class athletes. I chatted with Tiger Woods at the '96 Canadian Open, and my younger brother once met Wayne Gretzky in an elevator. Two summers ago, I played a little golf with Julius Erving.

I'm bothered by the line "Sports keep our minds off of what really matters" because I think the fact that sports exist has much less to do with business than it does with our natural desire to find out who is the fastest, the strongest or the toughest. I would even argue that professional athletes – as arrogant as some of them are – are ambassadors of something beyond their own particular vocation.

Finally, I don't like the compartmentalizing that creeps up in the argument that sports are not important. What do you think, Elizabeth?

Dirk

✉ ✉ ✉

Dear Dirk,

At first, I was going to agree with you and say your approach is certainly reasonable: "Professional sports are not inherently antithetical to creation but often become corrupted by greed." I, too, hate blanket statements that box anything as all bad or all good, and to condemn professional sports for keeping you from what you should be thinking about smacks too much of dualism for me to swallow.

But … (there's always a "but," isn't there?) your last paragraph bothers me. You outline exactly what sport is intended to do, and all of those goals are admirable. Praising the human body and its achievements is as much a part of celebrating God's creation as is expressing wonder at a newborn baby, or a first snowfall, or a prairie sunset. And I have no problem admitting that I got quite a thrill out of taking in a hockey game at Maple Leaf Gardens with my dad. As a family, we were as "Canadian" as the rest of the country when it came to the Saturday night ritual of Hockey Night in Canada.

So for me to experience with my dad the white mist rising off of the ice and the bright lights and the cheering crowds in that chilly arena gave me goose-bumps. Hockey is an important part of Canadian social history and my own personal history. Not to mention that a well-played hockey game is poetry in motion. These are things to treasure.

But do professional sports really celebrate the things you talk about, Dirk? Are professional athletes truly ambassadors? Noble thoughts, but I hardly think that's today's reality. I dare say you're romanticizing the facts, Dirk.

E.

✉ ✉ ✉

Elizabeth,

Yes, I'm romanticizing – if we use the word "romance" to refer to the exultation of individual aspirations. But I'm not romanticizing if we use the word to mean high exaggeration. Actually, I try to stay as honest as possible about professional sports. This is why I like to point out that Michael Jordan is considered by many to be a creep, that the New York Yankees "bought" another world title because of the lack of parity in professional baseball, and that you cannot win a major body-building title without steroids.

But having said that, Elizabeth, I still believe in greatness. I think it was great how Michael Jordan, time after time, took revenge on his critics by winning. I think it was great how Sebastian Coe, worried about his powerful rivals, sprinted for two laps and ended up shattering the world 800-metre track mark. If eight-time Mr. Olympia Lee Haney's 250-pound frame was really drug free – as he claimed it was – then his body was one of the greatest sights in creation.

Maybe I can best summarize how I feel with this story. A few years ago I was in downtown Toronto in April. It was evening, and I was heading out of the city. The Chicago Bulls were in town to play the Raptors, so I parked my car on a side street and walked to SkyDome. The scalpers were out and I tried to find a cheap ticket. It was already well into the second quarter. The cheapest were nose-bleeders going for $50. "Forget it, man," I said to one scalper. "That's a rip-off."

"Maybe it is," the scalper said, "But Michael Jordan is in that building, buddy." Even this scalper knew there was something in what he was doing that was at the same time both fraudulent (and wrong) and awesome (and therefore legitimate).

One other point. Without patting myself on the back too much, I think the way I approach professional sports is better than how the average couch potato does. It's healthy. You see, I'm activated by professional sports.

I start to read, write, analyze, make hypotheses and arrive at conclusions. I become a participant. And this doesn't even mention how many different sports I've been encouraged to play after seeing them on TV or reading about them in a newspaper or encyclopedia.

Dirk

✉ ✉ ✉

Dirk,

I'm not putting down sports as a past-time. If one Wayne Gretzky motivates a generation of hockey players, then the influence of professional hockey is worthy. But there is something intrinsically wrong when star athletes are negotiating million-dollar salaries while schools in our country are struggling to provide the proper equipment children need for a decent sports program. Don't you see what's wrong with this picture? It's all about balance. Where is the moderation? Why glorify what one single athlete has done for the game of basketball when the majority of our population is so inactive it's a significant health issue?

Answer me this, Dirk: were you willing to pay $50 to celebrate greatness, or to celebrate celebrity? I'm not so sure the two are distinct in your mind.

E.

✉ ✉ ✉

Elizabeth,

Wait a second. You can't connect my glorifying certain athletic accomplishments to the fact that an entire generation of people are physically inactive. It's not my fault that people choose to be couch potatoes. As a matter of fact, that I'm physically active myself is tied in very much with my appreciation of athletic achievement.

As for million dollar contracts and $50 tickets, well, you're right. It's pretty sick. I'm just as frustrated as the next person. I didn't buy that Bulls-Raptors ticket because I wasn't willing to pay that kind of money.

Most likely I will never see a live NBA game. Like many sports fans, I participate in professional sports from a long distance. If I go to see college hoops, it's across the river in Buffalo, where it costs $5 a ticket. If I want to watch a heavyweight championship bout, I go to a sports bar, order a chocolate milkshake, and sit in a corner alone. And there's always the TV and the newspaper.

Still, I can't shake this bug. I need to know who's the best in the world at running, throwing, diving, lifting, shooting, jumping, batting. Maybe the 21st century will see a huge revolution brought on by the viewing masses and these athletes will come down to earth again. Until then, I'm just going to follow my conscience and appreciate this aspect of life – even if it means from a distance and with a certain amount of suspicion and chagrin.

Dirk

Elizabeth Salomons is a freelance writer who lives in Vancouver. Dirk Schouten teaches literature and writing at Kosin University in South Korea.

News Comment

Nose for News

Bert Hielema

A SPANISH TOWN had a problem: the cemetery was almost full and there was no other place to bury the dead, so the mayor of the town issued an order that, due to limited availability of burial plots, people were urged to take care of their health and postpone dying as much as possible.

This reminds me of Ontario Premier Harris and Alberta's Ralph Klein, who are busy getting people prematurely into the grave. How? They are taking from the poor so that the rich will keep voting for them. Harris, especially, plans to cut welfare benefits again, wants to make it more difficult for students to get loans, and is generally promoting what the Royal Bank of Canada and other financial strongholds are doing: in spite of record profits and revenue, cutting jobs.

The results are more uncertainty, more social problems and more demand on the healthcare system, which will increase the need for more government funding in that area, and more tax dollars. A vicious circle, indeed. Instead of creating more happiness and balance, which also promotes physical well-being, the people in power worship the Almighty Dollar, a most cruel idol.

WHEN HISTORIANS look back at North America in the momentous year 2000 – now only a few hundred hours away – what will they read in the history books? Neil Postman in his latest book, *Building a Bridge to the Eighteenth Century: How the Past Can Improve Our Future*, thinks that when historians in the year 2100 look at the years 1900-1999, they will call our century the Second Dark Ages, an era marked by violence on an unprecedented scale, by epidemics of genocide, terrorism and wholesale barbarism.

In the 20th century, says this man who is chair of the Department of Culture and Communications at New York University, we were forced to conclude that millions of people lived longer, only to suffer more, fleeing from their reality in the fog of meaningless and messy movies with empty entertainment being a daily opiate.

These words are not unexpected from Postman, who severely critiqued television in a previous book, *Amusing ourselves to Death* (1985). He remarked in an interview: "I think what form religion will take in the next century is one of the most interesting and important questions, because we do need some transcendent story."

TRANSCENDENCE is closely related to spirituality, which, of course, is a loaded word. Here is what I mean with it: Spirituality is the inclusion in our lives of various practices of prayer, meditation, contemplation and inspirational reading that have characterized Christians from the beginning. I see Christian spirituality rooted in Judaism, focused on Jesus, shaped by the God known in Jesus and the Spirit. In my life it embraces my whole person and I look outward in love at Gods's world, where I try to live so that my passing into the New Creation does not come to me as a culture shock but as a continuation of conscious trial and error to live holistically.

I AM FINDING OUT that to attain such a New Creation life is not easy, so I was surprised to find some helpful hints in a new book, *How to think like Leonardo da Vinci: Seven Steps to Genius Every Day*.

They are:
1. Be curious;
2. Think for yourself;
3. Sharpen your senses;
4. Embrace ambiguity, paradox and uncertainty.
5. Balance art and science, logic and imagination with intuition.
6. Balance body and mind.
7. Try to see how everything connects to everything else.

These guidelines made Da Vinci a genius. He lived about 500 years ago and was a painter, sculptor, musician, scientist. His most famous masterpiece is the *Last Supper*, replicas of which hang in many churches and homes.

THE REIGNING spirituality, as promoted by most politicians, is more characterized by the new TV show: "Who Wants to be a Millionaire?" According to reports I have read, "Millionaire" is gathering North Americans from all walks of life around the electronic hearth in the way "I Love Lucy" did a generation ago. Low-attention-span kids and bored teenagers watch. Parents watch. The elderly watch. At long last we have a commonly accepted cultural value that unites the entire family: GREED, all brought to us by the wonderful world of the Disney Company.

HERE WE ARE, at the end of a century, with the door to the new millennium wide open, inviting us to what? To Las Vegas, North America's fastest-growing city? People now are spending more on gambling than on groceries. Is that what we want in the future?

THE FUTURE fascinates me. Here is something that I can relate to. I found it in a recent *Globe and Mail*. For a certain group of Native Canadians, the Anishnabe, the next millennium coincides with the time of the "seventh fire," the possible last stage of their (and our) history. Each of the preceding fires comes in the form of a prediction.

For the sake of brevity, I'll cite only the last few stages: in the fifth fire, due to the influence of light-skinned people (us) their hearts would fill with greed and fish would become inedible. In the sixth fire the native children would be taken away from the traditional teaching of the elders (by the mainline churches to convert them) and in the seventh fire the people would have a choice: if they continue on the path of greed, suffering and death would beset Earth. If they honored the spiritual, they would light the Eighth Fire, an eternal fire of peace, respect and harmony.

I BELIEVE THAT it is more than coincidence that the Chewong people in Malaysia have a similar historical heritage. I found this in a book I have, *Wisdom of the Elders*. Let me quote the first paragraph: "One day soon Tohan, the creator of the first human beings, will once again destroy all life on earth.... He will cleanse the face of Earth. Seven – the familiar realm of ordinary animals and plants and human beings – only because once again, humans have neglected their responsibility to care for its lands and life-forms." It is even more of a coincidence (I call it a providential miracle) that I, not knowing that such myths existed, have written a web-book called *The Eighth Day: Life and Love in the Hereafter*, which can be viewed on my website, the code for which is listed at the bottom of this article.

IS IT ALSO COINCIDENCE that the current global gravity point is changing back? The Old world is haunting the New again. Draw a circle with a 1,000 km radius with Turkey as the centre, and it contains both the crossroads of the Eastern Hemisphere and the persistent focal point of political crises since Roman times: over the centuries every square inch of this area has been a flashpoint of conflict. Now the Russian attack on Chechnya may inflame this region again. This declaration of war indicates a strategic decision, an indication that the Moscow military believes that the empire's disintegration has reached its limit; so Chechnya will not be permitted to become independent.

However, with small autonomous states such as Georgia, Armenia and Dagestan bordering Chechnya, and between Turkey and Russia, Russian control over this troublesome country will never be truly secure unless this angry Bear also conquers these small countries again. And that will pit it against Turkey, a member of NATO and thus against the U.S. again. This whole area contains the cradle of European, Asian and African cultures, the places where ancient empires were made and broken as far back as human history has been recorded. Are we coming full circle? Will, where it all started, also be where the End will come?

ANOTHER MILLENIAL development to watch: The saying that "a woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle" seems to be true: women are really better off without a man in their life, so says a recent report. Millions of women will choose to live alone, unfettered by the demands of a husband and children, enjoying a fulfilling social life and realizing their ambitions both professionally and personally. Their male counterparts will be surviving rather than striving in this brave new world, consoling themselves with alcohol, fast foods, videos and computer games.

This is the picture scanned from a report commissioned by the (British) Economic and Social Research Council for the year 2010, when 40 per cent of the households will be "home alone" single people, who will be leading radically different lifestyles divided along strict gender lines.

Single women in their 30s and 40s will have well-developed social networks and be involved in a wide range of activities. Men, on the other hand, appear to be sad, isolated, lonely cases.

THE HARD TRUTH seems to be that living alone is good for women and bad for men. Says the report, "Men are much more dependent on a wife for emotional and psychological support – a wife who is no longer there in many cases. While single women will enjoy a full social life, with trips to theatre, church, gym, friends and evening classes, their male equivalents will be far more likely to spend their leisure time lounging around home, washing their take-out meal down with a beer while watching videos and playing computer games."

Says Prof. Scase, the author, "In the next century the impact could be startling. Poor diet, lack of exercise and depression are all on the rise among men." If this picture is accurate, a man without a woman may well be like a fish out of the water.

Bert Hielema thanks God every day for his spouse and the support he has had from her in more than 46 years of marriage. His web page, on which also appears **The Eighth Day, Life and Love in the Hereafter,** *is: www.geocities.com/hielemab*

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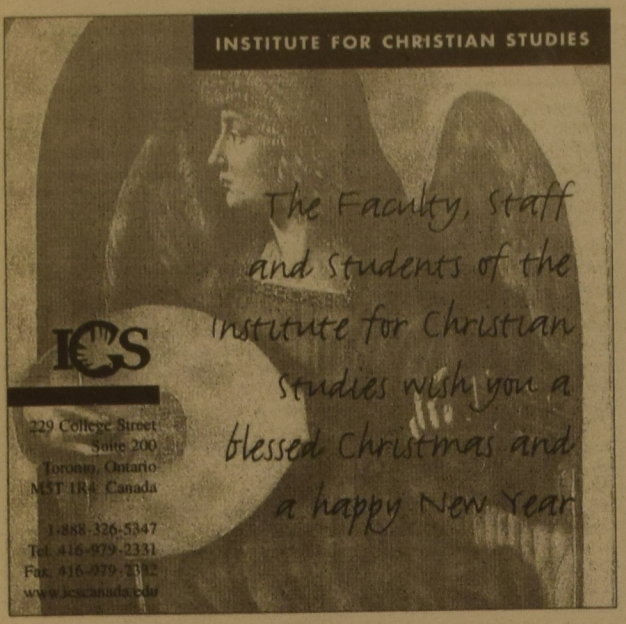

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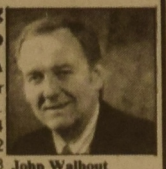
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As of May 1999:
Note: 7% GST will be added to all prices listed below.

DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION
Christian Courier is published on alternate Mondays. Copy deadline for each issue is 8:30 a.m. Wednesday, eight business days prior to publication.

RATES
The cost of advertising space is **$14.00 per column inch (pci) of length**. (All columns are 2 inches wide.) This rate applies to all personal and family announcements as well as all other types of advertising, including multi-column display ads. Clients will be invoiced after publication.

PHOTOS
There is a processing fee of $25 for the inclusion of a photograph with a personal or family announcement. Photo space is not charged pci, but we reserve the right to determine published photo size. Please note that we cannot use a faxed photo. We need either an original (which we will return) or a downloadable internet image.

PERSONAL ADS
Christian Courier would be pleased to handle your personal ad in an efficient and discreet manner. The cost to set up a personal file under a unique file number is $35. Ads requesting correspondence with this file are run at $15 per insertion. All correspondence is immediately forwarded unopened.

NEWLYWEDS & NEW PARENTS
We offer a $25 one-year subscription to couples whose wedding is announced in *Christian Courier* AND to parents who announce the birth of a child in our paper. Please let us know when placing your ad that you want to take advantage of this offer.

SUBMITTING YOUR AD
mail: *Christian Courier*
#4 - 261 Martindale Road
St. Catharines, ON L2W 1A1
fax: 905-682-8313
email: ccadpromo@aol.com

OTHER INFORMATION
a) *Christian Courier* reserves the right to print classifieds using our usual format.

Wedding

SNIP-VAN TUYL
With thankfulness of heart and believing that God has brought them together, John and Cathy Snip, and Joe and Ann Van Tuyl announce the forthcoming marriage of their children,
JANE CATHY
and
JAMES RICHARD
This celebration of love will take place, D.V., on Saturday, March 18, 2000 at 4:30 p.m. at the Bethel Christian Reformed Church of Dunnville, ON, Rev. Harry VanderWindt officiating.
Future address: 722 Lincoln St., P.O. Box #43, Wellandport, ON L0R 2J0

Classifieds Get *RESULTS!*
... BECAUSE OVER 10,000 READERS ARE LOOKING AT YOUR NOTICE OR AD.
WOW!

Birthday

December 8, 1999
It is with much joy and thankfulness that we celebrate the birtday of our mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother
ANTJE KINGMA
May God continue to bless her in the years to come.
Wishing her a happy birthday are her children:
Patsy & Hugh Pranger
MaryAnn & Jerry Kingma
Wilma & Wick Hamstra
Gretchen & Gary VanArragon
Ruth & Hank Haan
Corrie & John Beintema
30 grandchildren and 29 great-grandchildren.
An "Open House" will be held in her honor on Dec.11, 1999, from 2 - 4 p.m. at Trillium Village, Strathroy.
Mom's address: 40-400 Dominion St., Strathroy ON N7G 3G8

Anniversary

45th Wedding Anniversary
1954 December 18 1999
PIETER and AAFKE GREYDANUS
(nee STRIEKSTRA)
We, your children, give God all the glory and praise through what he has given us through you both.
Irene & Paul
Alicia, Julianna, Peter, Maria
Jack & Chris
Peter, Jodi, Jenna
Bill & Kathy
Rhonda & Ryan, Tony & Sarah, Anita, Carla
Owen & Lisa
Maryann, Mitchell, Michelle, David
Janet & Darren
Jordan
Ian & Caroline
Jessica, Travis, Drew, Adrien
Tine & John
Yvonne, Robert, Jamie, Christine
Lynn & Robin
Great-grandchildren:
Meghan, Deanna, Kyler
You are invited to an Open House at the Fellowship Christian Reformed Church in Brighton, Ont. on December 18, 1999, from 2 - 4 p.m.
Correspondence address: RR #1, Grafton, ON K0K 2G0

Obituary

On November 18, 1999, the Lord called home our dear father, grandfather and great-grandfather
KLAAS AMSINGA
in his 99th year.
Sadly missed by his children:
Joe Amsinga — Ingersoll, Ont.
Henry & Greta Amsinga — London, Ont.
Agatha & Leen Vandeban — Seaforth, Ont.
John & Martha Amsinga — Brantford, Ont.
15 grandchildren and 5 great-grandchildren.
Correspondence address:
Henry Amsinga, 224 Winnipeg St., London ON N5W 4T9

Obituaries

"For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him."
(Psalm 103:11)
On November 2, 1999,
ANDY (ANDRIES) BEERDA
went to be with his Lord at the age of 70, after a courageous battle with cancer.
We will miss him as brothers and sisters, nieces and nephews.
Griet Beerda & fam. — the Neth.
Gerrit & Gaats Beerda & fam. — the Netherlands
Sietze & Tolly Beerda & fam. — the Netherlands
Sophie & Hark Vandermeulen & fam. — Smithers, B.C.
Corrie & Martin VanderKruyk & fam. — Duncan, B.C.
Bill & Rena Brandsma & fam. — Smithers, B.C.
Mike & Jenny Bandstra & fam. — Lindsay, Ont.
Jack & Shirley Reitsma & fam. — Smithers, B.C.
We pray for Ann and family, that God may give them strength and courage in this time of sorrow.

Oenkerk, Fr. Whitby,
the Neth. Ont.
1910 1999
The Lord called home suddenly, on Oct.2, 1999
PATRICIA DEVRIES(HUIZENGA)
Dear wife of the late Auke Devries and Charles Huizenga.
Dear mother of
John & Georgina Huizenga — Bloomfield
Sylvia & Paul Hordyk — Millbrook
Sidney & Sharon Huizenga — Picton
Fred & Mary Huizenga — Napanee
Lynne Kamink — Trenton
Dirk Kamink — Belleville
and the late Jane Prinzen
Dear stepmother of Ruth Hoekstra, Arnold, the late John, Allan, Jane and Sid Devries.
Also missed by her 15 grandchildren and her 14 great-grandchildren.
Her favorite Psalm was 139:
"Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my thoughts; Lead me in the way everlasting."
The funeral service was held at Bethany Chr.Ref.Church, Bloomfield, Ont. On Tuesday, Oct.5, 1999, Rev.R. Praamsma officiated. Interment at Glenwood Cemetery, Picton.

For Sale

Dutch commentaries for sale: complete set of Korte Verklaring (62 vol.) and 27 volumes of Commentaar (19 on OT. and 8 on NT.) Asking $ 600. or best offer. Please call **705-326-1721** after 4 o'clock.

Advertise in Christian Courier's Business Directory. For the low cost of $25 (plus G.S.T.) you can advertise your business.

Obituaries

Zwijndrecht Hamilton
the Neth. Ont.
April 28, 1913 - November 7, 1999
Psalm 37:25-28.
While surrounded by his family in Hamilton,
WILLEM BEZEMER
was suddenly taken into the arms of his Lord and Savior, on Sunday, November 7, 1999, at the age of 86 years. Beloved husband of Nel, and loving father of:
Brian & Kathie Bezemer — Caledonia
Clement & Ann Bezemer — Grimsby
Hester & Piet Kapteyn — Abbotsford
Peter & Brenda Bezemer — Caledonia
Theo & Pat Bezemer — Caledonia
Jim & Audrey Bezemer — Ancaster
and Nel's children:
Eric & Raedene Rotgans — Victoria
Trudy & Terrence Hanlon — Nanaimo, B.C.
Cherished Opa of 20 grandchildren, 21 great-grandchildren and five step-grandchildren. Pre-deceased by one granddaughter and his first wife Maria DeKruyk (1913-1949) and his second wife Wilma Spoelstra (1911-1981).
In recognition of his service in the Dutch Resistance during WWII, Bill received commendations from Prince Bernhard, Commander of the Netherlands Interior Forces; the Mayor and Council of the City of Breda, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Commander of US Forces - European Theatre, and Air Marshal A.W.Tedder, Deputy Supreme Commander of Allied Forces, as well as being awarded the Netherlands War Cross and Resistance Commemorative Cross by the Queen of the Netherlands. After immigrating to Canada in 1953, Willem and his family resided in Chatham, Winona and St.Catharines, Ontario, before he moved to Abbotsford, B.C. eleven years ago.
Interment took place on Wednesday, November 10, 1999, at Niagara Lakeshore Cemetery, Niagara-on-the-Lake.
Correspondence address:
Mrs. Nel Bezemer, 2234 Mountain Dr., Abbotsford BC V2S 2N4

"My only comfort is that in life and in death I belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ..." (Heid.Cat.Lord's Day 1)
After a nine year long battle with cancer the Lord took his child home on Nov. 22, 1999, our dear sister and sister-in-law
TRUDY HEERSINK
at the age of 70 years.
Grada Heersink-Obbink
Jo Oberink-Heersink
Derk & Clari Heersink
all of Aalten, the Netherlands
Annie Heersink-Meier — Bloemfontein, South Africa
Gerrit & Iefke Heersink — Peterborough, Ont.
Predeceased by two brothers: Jan(1976) and Henk(1993).
We, together with the many nieces and nephews and the countless friends are thankful to the Lord for what she has been to all of us.
A funeral service was held on Nov.25, 1999, in St. Ola United Church, the Revs. M. Montgomery and G.J. Heersink officiating.
Correspondence address:
G.J. Heersink, 105-650 Parkhill Rd.W, Peterborough ON K9J 6N6

Obituaries

MRS. LENA LANGENDOEN
(nee STOLK)
"...and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." (Psalm 23:6b)
It is with great joy that our mother and Oma passed away into the presence of our Lord on November 10, 1999 at Shalom Manor, Grimsby.
She was loved dearly by her family and friends and will be missed for her love, faithfulness and commitment to our Lord and to her family.
She is survived by her children:
Sam & Mary Vander Flier (Langendoen)
Harry & Corrie Langendoen
Evert & Dauwina Langendoen
John & Audrey Van Dyk (Langendoen)
Loved by her 14 grandchildren and 19 great-grandchildren.
Correspondence address:
Mrs. Mary Vander Flier, 11 Juliana Cres., St.Catharines ON L2M 4B5

1900 - 1999
FRANCES (FROUKJE) VISSER
(nee KOOTSTRA)
On Nov.18, 1999, at Holland Christian Homes, Brampton, Ont., it pleased the Lord to take home his child, our dear mother, grandmother and great-grandmother, in her 100th year.
She was predeceased by her husband Adrianus Visser in 1986. Now unburdened, she may rejoice with him in the presence of the Lord.
A LIFE LIVED TO THE FULL. Ps.91:16.
Her children:
Lucy Hogeterp — Brampton, Ont.
Metje VanderKloet-Visser — Bergum, Fr.
Ruurd & Henny Visser — Kitchener, Ont.
Jikke & Jan Bouwma — Wirdum, Fr.
Betty & Nick Anema — Simcoe, Ont.
George & Jessie Visser — Simcoe, Ont.
Mels Noordermeer — Stryen, Z.H.
Claire Visser — Brampton, Ont.
Predeceased by her daughter Frances (1993), sons-in-law Peter Hogeterp (1991) and Ebe VanderKloet (1984) as well as one sister and two brothers.
Lovingly remembered by her 39 grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.
The funeral service was held on Saturday Nov.20, 1999, at Immanuel Christian Reformed Church, Simcoe, Ont., Pastors P. VanEgmond and Ray VanderKooy officiating.
Correspondence address:
C. Visser, 273 Bartley Bull Pkwy, Brampton ON L6W 2L2

Job Opportunities

Full-time, live-out, Christian child care provider needed in my **Etobicoke** home for 3 children starting early January, 2000.
Call Judy at **416-251-6649**.

Personal

Healthy, active Christian widower, early 70s, wishes to meet a lady who loves the Lord and enjoys life. Please send letters to **File #2699 c/o Christian Courier, 4-261 Martindale Rd., St.Catharines L2W 1A1**. All inquiries will be given a reply.

Classifieds

Anniversaries

Wellandport, Ont. Dunnville, Ont.
1959 December 30 1999
"Loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice and cleaving to him; for that means life to you and length of days." (Deut.30:20)
With praise and thankfulness to the Lord for his love and faithfulness, we rejoice in the 40 years of marriage given to our parents and grandparents
RICK and WILLY ZANTINGH
(nee SJAARDA)
We thank God for the years he has given them and the blessing they have been to us.
Congratulations and love from your children and grandchildren:
Ken & Nancy Zantingh — Dunnville
Wesley, Ryan, Deanna, Jessica, Seth, Esther
Bruce & Liz Zantingh — Dunnville
Nicole, Sarah, Aaron
Sonya & Gerry te Brake — Burlington
Rebecca, Joshua, Emily, Leah, Hannah, Victoria, David
Chris & Monica Zantingh — Dunnville
Luke, Joseph, Jacob
Cynthia & Alex Buist — Canfield
Calvin, Ashley, Jonathan
Andrew & Kelly Zantingh — Grand Rapids, Mich.
Joanne & Eric DeKorte — Fenwick
Scott, Kimberly
Open House: Thursday, December 30, 1999, D.V. From 2 - 4 p.m. in the Dunnville Christian School - Heritage Hall. Best wishes only.
Address: R.R.1, Dunnville ON N1A 2W1

1949 December 17 1999
With joy and thanksgiving to our Heavenly Father, who has kept them in His care and blessed us with their love and guidance, we hope to celebrate the 50th wedding anniversary D.V., of our parents and grandparents
JOHN and HILDA VANDENDOOL
(nee KROL)
We thank the Lord for the time He has given our parents together and pray that He will further bless them in the years to come. Their thankful children and grandchildren:
Tony & Debbie VandenDool —
Coquitlam, B.C.
Corinne, Ian
Orval & Brigette VandenDool —
London, Ont.
Lisa, Mark
Ed VandenDool — Stratford, Ont.
Janis, Jonathan
Grace & Jim Dekker — Port Franks, Ont.
Ryan
Robert & Marilene VandenDool —
Cambridge, Ont.
Jordan, Emmy
Open House will be held on December 18, 1999 D.V. at Trillium Village Main Hall, 400 Dominion St., Strathroy, Ont. from 2 - 4 p.m.

Home Sweet Classifieds!

Home Exchange

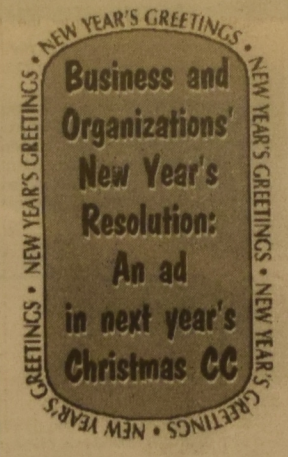
Couple in Hamilton, Ont., area looking for family in the Netherlands to participate in a house exchange July 2000.

Obituary

On Saturday, November 27, 1999, the Lord took unto himself our dear father, grandfather and great- grandfather
LUITSEN (LOUIS) DROST
Predeceased by his dear wife Grace (1994). Louis was the loving father of:
John & Nelly
Peter
Elco & Mary
Andy & Margaret
Gary & Sherri
all from Niagara Falls, Ontario
Lovingly remembered by his 10 grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.
A funeral service was held on Tuesday, November 30, 1999 at the Rehoboth Chr. Ref. Church. Dr. H. Vander Plaat officiated. Burial at Fairview Cemetery, Niagara Falls, Ont.
Correspondence address: John Drost,
4137 Campbell Ave., Niagara Falls, ON L2E 6R3

Accommodation

Accommodation available for non-smoking female in Mississauga, Ont. $ 400./month.
Please call **905-812-1237**



Teachers

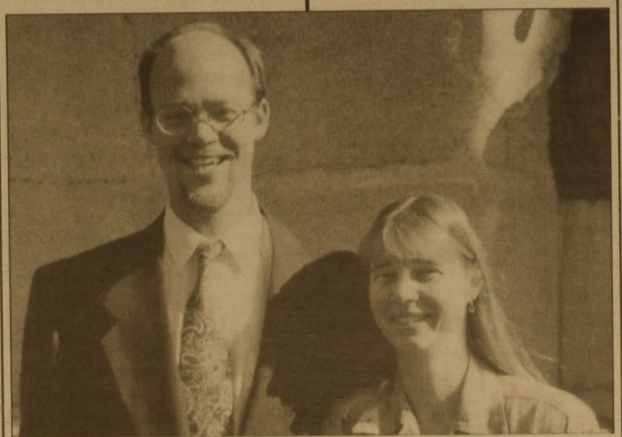
TERRACE, B.C.:
Teaching position open.
Centennial Christian School in Terrace, B.C., invites applications from committed Christian educators to fill two new openings for January 2000 in the following areas:
Primary Grade Three
Intermediate Grade Four
These positions may also involve duties in other areas.
Centennial Christian School is an interdenominational school and presently offers Christian education to approximately 225 students in Kindergarten - Grade 10. Please send letter of application, resume and other pertinent information to:
Centennial Christian School
Frank Voogd, Principal
3608 Sparks St.,
Terrace, B.C. V8G 2V6
Phone: (250) 635-6173
Fax: (250) 635-9385

Job Opportunity

John Knox Christian School in Woodstock, Ontario requires a Transportation Supervisor. The duties, which will begin in August, include scheduling, minor maintenance, and some administrative tasks. For additional information and salary, please contact:
Mr. Simon VandenDool,
RR #5, Woodstock, ON
N4S 7V9
Tel: 519-467-5422

Wedding

"For I know the plans I have for you", declares the Lord... (Jeremiah 29:11)
Trusting in the Lord's plan for their lives together
CINDY VAN OFWEGEN
AND
BILL DYKSTRA
together with their parents
Mr. and Mrs. Frank van Ofwegen
and Rev. and Mrs. William Dykstra
joyfully announce their upcoming marriage D.V. Thursday, December 23, 1999.
Future address:
415 Mooney Crescent, Orillia ON L3V 6R5



Congratulations to Cindy van Ofwegen & Bill Dykstra on their upcoming wedding.

Miscellaneous

MARGRIET OR LIBELLE

Now with complimentary Nederlandse COURANT!
☐ Margriet
☐ Libelle
A Great Christmas Gift

☐ 1/2 year (26 issues) $ 59.95 ☐ 1 year (52 issues) $99.95
☐ 2 years (104 issues) $179.95 (mailed every 2 weeks)

With your 2 year subscription you will receive a Christmas gift from us, the "Improvisations" CD from organist Willem van Suydam. (Value: $25.00)

Name: _____
Address: _____
City: _____
Prov/State/Code: _____
Phone: _____

This is an AFTERMARKET product. **Send this coupon and cheque to:**

De Nederlandse COURANT
3019 Harvester Road, Burlington, ON L7N 3G4, Canada
P.O. Box 603, Lewiston, NY 14092, U.S.A

DORDT COLLEGE

FACULTY POSITION
Beginning August 2000

One year position to teach general education courses in biblical theology, upper level courses in biblical studies.

THEOLOGY DEPARTMENT

Review of applications will begin December 15 and continue until the position is filled. Qualifications include a Ph.D. in theology or religion and demonstrated teaching excellence. To apply, qualified persons committed to a Reformed, biblical perspective and educational philosophy are encouraged to send a letter of inquiry and a curriculum vitae/resume:

Dr. Rockne McCarthy
Vice President for Academic Affairs
Dordt College
498 4th Avenue NE
Sioux Center, IA 51250-1697

Telephone: 712 722-6333
Facsimile: 712 722-4496
E-mail: vpaa@dordt.edu
Web site: www.dordt.edu/offices/acadaff

Dordt College encourages the nominations and candidacies of women, minorities, and persons with disabilities.

Advertising

At The Bible League, we are able to observe and celebrate in special ways the truth "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John1:14).

God's written word directs us to the living word...Jesus Christ! This past year, thousands of people came to know Jesus Christ as their Saviour because they received a copy of the written word.

Your will and estate planning can insure that this important ministry will continue to allow the light of Jesus Christ to shine in the darkness of the human heart and the darkness of our world.

For more information, please call The Bible League at 1-800-363-9673 (WORD).

THE BIBLE LEAGUE of Canada
PO Box 5037
Burlington, ON L7R 3Y8
www.thebibleleague.ca

Christian Schools International

DIRECTOR FOR DEVELOPING SCHOOLS

The Director for Developing Schools implements CSI's plan to help develop Christian schools in North American inner cities and in developing nations, managing all aspects of this development and equipping educational staff.

Qualifications include multicultural experience, proven managerial expertise, excellent communication skills, and strong commitment to Christian schooling.

To obtain a job description or additional information, call 800-635-8288, ext. 222.

To apply, send a cover letter, resume, 3 professional refences, and a statement of commitment to the Reformed faith and to Christian education.

Application deadline: January 21, 2000.

CSI Daniel R. Vander Ark, Director
Christian Schools International
3350 East Paris Ave. S.E.
Grand Rapids, MI 49512-3054

To all our readers in other countries...

warm greetings from Canada

SEKOLAH PELITA HARAPAN, Indonesia's leading Christian School, is seeking Teachers immediately for its expanding programmes.

Stability in Indonesia has caused many students to return and stretch our resources. In a school now of over 800 pupils K-12 we need experienced Elementary teachers and High School teachers to start January 17th, 2000. We have many Canadian Teachers already on staff as a result of last year's hiring. English, Social Studies, Math and Science subjects have openings. Visit our Web Site at www.sph.edu and communicate with Hugh Mawby at coachem@hotmail.com. A school representative will be in Canada during the Christmas Holidays and will phone to discuss your interest.

Applications Accepted for Two Principal Positions

Abbotsford Christian School, a multi-denominational school system serving over 1100 students at 3 campuses, is inviting applications for an elementary (K-7) principal at the Heritage campus and a high school (8-12) principal at the Secondary campus.

We are looking for experienced and enthusiastic leaders who are deeply committed to Christian education and are excited about working as part of a leadership team.

Application deadline: December 31, 1999
Please direct resumes or inquiries to:
Ed Noot, Principal
Abbotsford Christian School – Clayburn Hills Campus
3939 Old Clayburn Road, Abbotsford, BC V3G 1J9
phone: 604-850-2694 fax: 604-850-7075
e-mail: enoot@uniserve.com

PACIFIC CHRISTIAN SCHOOL – Victoria, BC

ADMINISTRATIVE OPENINGS

Pacific Christian School is a well-established, dynamic, inter-denominational Christian School system with 750 students in pre-school through grade 12. The school draws its enrolment from 80 different churches representing 14 different denominations in the greater Victoria area.

A SECONDARY ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL is required to fill a leave of absence for the 2000/2001 school year.

A SECONDARY PRINCIPAL is required for September 2001 to direct and oversee the operation of the high school with a staff of 25 and an enrolment of 330 students in grades 8-12. The secondary principal would join an administrative team that includes the elementary principal and a business manager in providing a viable Christian education for the pre-school through grade 12 system. A successful applicant could serve as Assistant Principal or possibly as Co-Principal for the 2000/2001 school year to allow for a smooth transition.

Candidates must be committed Christians, be team players, and be able to articulate a sound vision of Christian education. Candidates are expected to demonstrate spiritual, educational, administrative and financial leadership. Pacific Christian School seeks candidates that have exhibited successful experience in Christian School leadership and who qualify for a B.C. College of Teachers Professional Certificate.

Enquiries may be directed to John Messelink, Secondary Principal, at 250-479-4532 or Bill Helmus, Elementary Principal, at 250-479-9365. Please submit letter of application, resume and statement of faith by January 15, 2000 to:

Search Committee,
Pacific Christian School,
654 Agnes Street, Victoria, BC V8Z 2E6
fax: 250-479-3511
e-mail: pchs@islandnet.com

Houston Christian Reformed Church
in beautiful northwest British Columbia is seeking a

Full-Time Pastor

to provide sound biblical preaching, ministry to youth and pastoral care. The church membership stands at 67 families, which translates into 169 professing members and 154 non-professing or baptized members. Please send a copy of your profile. A church profile is available upon request. For more information, please contact:

Rick Delau, Search Committee,
Houston Christian Reformed Church
Box 6, Houston, BC V0J 1Z0
phone: 250-845-7756 fax: 250-845-7578

Laurentian Hills Christian School of Kitchener, Ontario,
is seeking a

Full-time Principal

starting in August 2000.

- We are an interdenominational K-8 school affiliated with the Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools and Christian Schools International. Our mission is to teach our children to recognize their place in God's world, providing an education that promotes a life of Christian service. We offer a full program of studies in a newly expanded facility, with 14 staff members serving a student population of 220.
- Our proactive Board is searching for a faith filled principal who is experienced in the team leader style of management, has excellent administrative strengths and an interest in partnering in strategic planning.
- If you have 3 to 5 years of administrative experience, we would like to hear from you. Candidates must have a Bachelor's degree, as well as a Teacher's certificate. Preference will be given to candidates with a CSTC or a CSPC.
- Applicants will include a statement of faith which describes their walk with the Lord and the educational implications of that relationship.

Please direct inquiries, resumes and statements of faith to:

Sandra Moon
614 Pine Island Crescent
Waterloo, Ontario
N2V 1T4

Social Service Work

Become a part of our team of committed professionals providing loving care for needy children.

Mutual Support Systems, a parent model network of rural group foster homes in the Niagara peninsula for children experiencing emotional and behavioural difficulties is searching for the following as part of its recent expansion:

RESIDENTIAL CHILD CARE WORKERS.
Related educational background is an asset. Competitive salary and benefits. This live-in position provides opportunities for out-of-province candidates.

Please contact Randy Klassen at:
Mutual Support Systems
P.O. Box 397
Fenwick, ON L0S 1C0
phone: 905-892-4332
e-mail: rklassen@mutualsupport.net
Visit us at:
http://www.mutualsupport.net

mutual SUPPORT

Classifieds/Events

Calendar of Events

Items appearing in this column are run free of charge if they advertise an admission-free event, if they accompany an ad for the same event, or at the discretion of CC. In case of free listing, space limitations apply. The charge otherwise is $7.50 per line, or $1.50 per line inch, per insertion.

Dec. 10 Christmas Concert with the Redeemer College Concert Choir, Quartets, Duets, Soloists, Brass Quintet & Organ. Redeemer College Auditorium, **Ancaster**, Ont., 8 p.m. Tickets $14, $12 Seniors/students. Call 905-648-2139 x4211 to order.(#)

Dec. 11 Liberation Choir Celebrates Christmas, with conductor Willem Van Suydam, accompanist Lucas Chorosinki, guest soloist Monica Ling Lin. Holland Christian Homes, **Brampton**, Ont., 7:30 p.m. 905-450-3774(#)

Dec. 11 Christmas Concert by the Ontario Christian Music Assembly, directed by Leendert Kooy, in the Central United Church, corner of King & Young Streets, **Welland**, Ont., 8 p.m. Adults: $10. 416-636-9779 (#)

Dec. 14 Christmas Concert by Ontario Christian Music Assembly, directed by Leendert Kooy, in the Maranatha CRC, Hwy 2 East, **Bowmanville**, Ont., 8 p.m. Adults $10, students $6, children under 12 free. 416-636-9779 (#)

Dec. 17 Liberation Choir Celebrates Christmas, with conductor Willem Van Suydam, accompanist Lucas Chorosinki, guest soloist Monica Ling Lin. The Cathedral of St. Catherine of Alexandria, 67 Church St., **St. Catharines**, Ont., 7:30 p.m. 905-934-3600 (#)

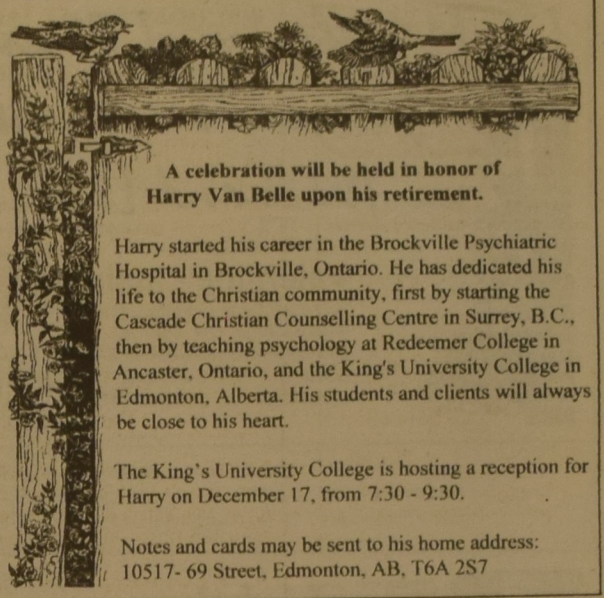
Dec. 18 Liberation Choir Celebrates Christmas, with conductor Willem Van Suydam, accompanist Lucas Chorosinki, guest soloist Monica Ling Lin. St. George's Anglican Church, 99 Woolwich St., **Guelph**, Ont., 7:30 p.m. 519-824-1646 or 519-638-2451

Dec. 18 Clarkson CRC presents Handel's "Messiah", performed by Arcady. Clarkson CRC, 1880 Lakeshore Road West, **Mississauga**, 7:30 p.m. Adults $15 Seniors/students $10. Phone 905-823-7262 to order.

Dec. 18 Christmas Concert by Ontario Christian Music Assembly, directed by Leendert Kooy, in the Willowdale United Church, Kenneth Ave. Behind Northtown Plaza, **Toronto**, Ont., 8 p.m. Adults $10, students $6, children under 12 free. 416-636-9779 (#)

Dec. 19 Dutch Service - Ancaster CRC, Hwy. 53, **Ancaster**, 3 p.m., Rev. Jack Van Marion. (#)

Jan. 30 Dutch Service - Ancaster CRC, Hwy. 53, **Ancaster**, 3 p.m., Rev. Henry DeBolster. (#)



A celebration will be held in honor of Harry Van Belle upon his retirement.

Harry started his career in the Brockville Psychiatric Hospital in Brockville, Ontario. He has dedicated his life to the Christian community, first by starting the Cascade Christian Counselling Centre in Surrey, B.C., then by teaching psychology at Redeemer College in Ancaster, Ontario, and the King's University College in Edmonton, Alberta. His students and clients will always be close to his heart.

The King's University College is hosting a reception for Harry on December 17, from 7:30 - 9:30.

Notes and cards may be sent to his home address: 10517- 69 Street, Edmonton, AB, T6A 2S7

LIBERATION CHOIR

Celebrates Christmas

Conductor: Willem van Suydam
Accompanist: Lucas Chorosinski
Guest Soloist: Monica Ling Lin

Saturday, Dec. 11, 7:30 p.m.
Brampton, Ont.
Holland Christian Homes
7900 McLaughlin Road
for tickets call Trudy or Martin Adema
at 905-450-3774

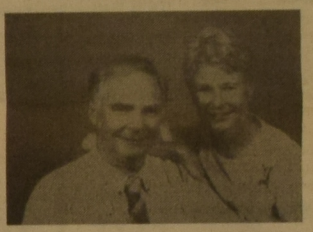
Friday, Dec. 17, 7:30 p.m.
St. Catharines, Ont.
The Cathedral of St. Catherine of Alexandria, 67 Church St.
for tickets call Chuck Dijkstra
at 905-934-3600

Saturday, Dec. 18, 7:30 p.m.
Guelph, Ont.
St. George's Anglican Church
99 Woolwich Street
for tickets call Menno Van Harten
at 519-824-1646
or Jayne Van Ankum
at 519-638-2451

Tickets can also be obtained from any choir member
TICKETS: in advance $10
at the door $12

The offices of *Christian Courier* will close on Christmas Eve – and not reopen until January 4.
All advertising for the January 10, 2000, issue must be in our hands by Monday, Dec. 20.

40 Years of Service



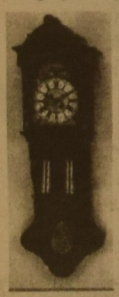
Pastor John Hellinga of Aylmer CRC will officially retire from the ministry of the Word and Sacraments. **His final service is scheduled for Sunday, Jan. 9, 2000, at 10:00 a.m.**

The congregation of Aylmer, Ont. is grateful to God for his 40 years of faithful service to the Lord Jesus and we invite you to join us in worship.

If your attendance is not possible, we encourage you to send words of greeting and congratulations to

Rev. John & Mrs. Jean Hellinga
8 Sinclair Ave.
Aylmer ON N5H 3B7.

Celebrate the Millennium with the gift of lasting time & quality.



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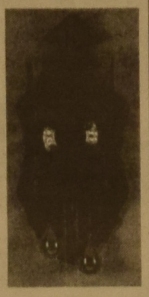

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50

Edmonton Society for Christian Education will celebrate its 50th Anniversary
May 19-21, 2000
Theme: "Find us Faithful"

We invite all former students, staff and supporters to plan now to attend the celebrations, which will include a banquet May 19, picnic May 20, and a church service May 21.

For more information, contact Carol Laan at the administration office 780-476-6281, or e-mail claan@epsb.edmonton.ab.ca
Web site: http://www.connect.ab.ca/~esce

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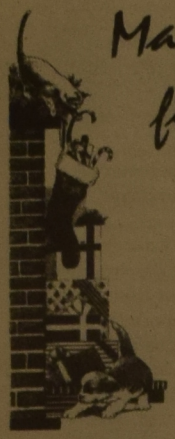

May the Joy of Christmas fill your heart with Peace and Love

from the staff of
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Mississauga, ON L5R 3K6
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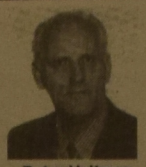

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The Wise Still Seek Him

May the humble birth of Jesus light your way this Christmas season and in the coming year.

The King's University College Community.

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Christian University Education
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Edmonton, AB T6B 2H3
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From the management, staff and residents of
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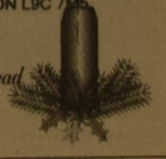
72 Town Centre Drive, Townsend, ON N0A 1S0
519-587-2448 www.kwic.com/~parkv

HOMESTEAD Residential and Support Services
Mailing address: PO Box 20058, 856 Upper James Postal Outlet, Hamilton, ON L9C 7N5

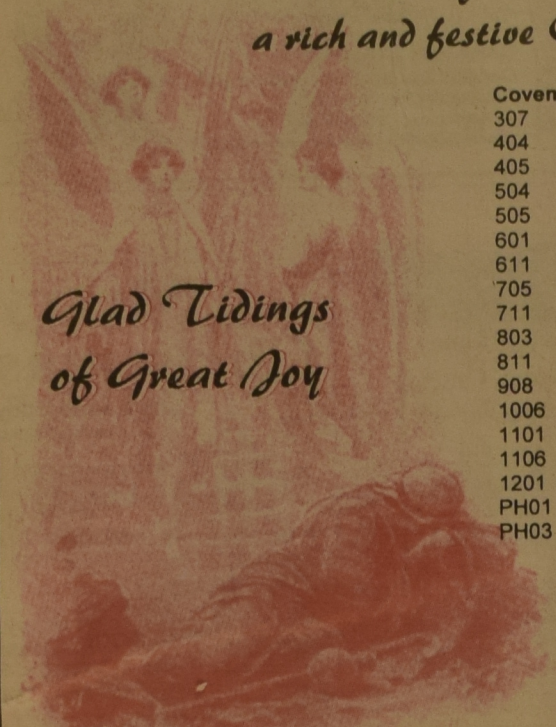
Warmest greetings at this Christmas season to our friends and many supporters from the board, staff and residents of Homestead



Rudy and Velva De Vries, House Co-ordinators, 905-529-0454

Advertising

The following residents of Holland Christian Homes wish everyone a rich and festive Christmas celebration in the joy of our Lord's incarnation:



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404 Grace Biersteker
405 Betty Tigchelaar
504 Art & Janet Castelein
505 Edo & Margaret Knibbe
601 Gertie Tjoelker
611 Johanna Bakker
705 Fenna Hulzebosch
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803 Fenna Groen
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116 Pieter Veenstra
208 Sandra Posthumus-Greydanus
307 Mies Beauchamp
310 Grada Meinen
312 Dina Schipper
405 George & Alice Keep
407 Elizabeth Van Harmelen
408 Grace Sliekers
413 Ann Bylsma
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507 Betty Welmers
514 Wilma Mulder
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May Christ the Saviour be at the centre of your Christmas celebrations

Season's Greetings

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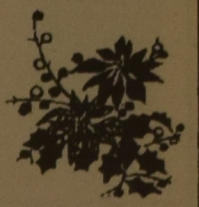
phone: 905-646-7331 fax: 905-646-0951



Warm Holiday Greetings from Our House to Your House

We wish you a Blessed Christmas and a Prosperous New Year

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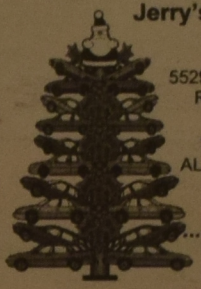

5529 Reg. Rd. 81 W.
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ALAN GERRITSEN

...and a Happy New Year

The residents of
Shalom Manor,
a Christian Long Term Care Facility in Grimsby, Ontario, convey to you - their loved ones and friends - at this blessed Christmas Season and throughout the New Year 2000 the following message:

Jesus was born
Not to receive but to give.....
Not to be served but to serve.....
Not to please Himself but to give His life as a ransom for all.....
Not to be a distant Saviour.....
but to be our closest Friend!

Wishing you
all the joys
His love brings

Christmas Blessings!

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Mr. Peter & Mrs. Karen Baarda
Mrs. Greta Bergman
Mrs. Annie Bokma
Mrs. Aleida Buesink
Mrs. Elisabeth Colenbrander
Mrs. Tine de Haan
Mrs. Aafje de Raaf
Mrs. Jacoba de Vries
Mr. Jacob & Mrs. Renskje de Vries
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Mr. Henry & Mrs. Cornelia Diemer
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Mrs. Jurienna Hartman
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Mr. Jack & Mrs. Grace Huisman
Mr. Aart & Mrs. Aaltje Jongejan
Mrs. Jannetje Kok
Mrs. Ida Meloen
Mrs. Jacqueline Noordzij
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Shalom Manor, 12 Bartlett Avenue, Grimsby, Ontario L3M 4N5 905-945-9631

Advertising

HCH

Season's Greetings

Friends, families, volunteers, staff and doctors, ministers, deacons, elders, and investors, directors, officials, testators and bequestors.
May the peace of Christmas be in your heart this season and throughout the New Year.

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Warmest holiday greetings from the staff of Christian Courier! May God bless you and your family during this holiday season and in the new millenium!

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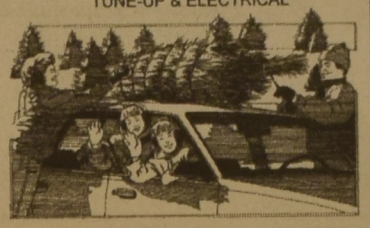

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Merry Christmas to all!
George Elgersma ❖ Henry Van Stralen ❖ Gary Huber

Advertising

The Board and Staff at OACS extend the joy and peace we share in the birth of Christ our Lord and Saviour.

"...in Him all things hold together." Col. 1:17

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